THE RED LODGE

NOVELS BY

VICTOR BRIDGES

*The Red Lodge*
*The King Comes Back*
*Greensea Island*
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*Mr. Lyndon at Liberty*
*The Lady from Longacre*
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# THE RED LODGE

## A MYSTERY OF CAMPDEN HILL

BY

VICTOR BRIDGES

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LIMITED LONDON

TO

MARGARET

## THE RED LODGE

## CHAPTER I

A DARK green Rolls-Royce limousine slid round the corner of Sydney Place, and, proceeding a few hundred yards along the Fulham Road, drew up in front of St. Christopher's Hospital. It had scarcely stopped before the door opened and its solitary occupant—a tall, well-dressed man of about fifty—stepped out on to the pavement.

"You can wait here, Simmons," he said, addressing the chauffeur. "I shan't be more than a few minutes."

The porter on duty, who was talking to a friend in the hall, touched his cap respectfully as the newcomer hurried past him in the direction of the main staircase.

"See that bloke, Fred ?" he whispered, jerking his thumb after the retreating figure. "That's Sir George Onslow, that is. Some pore beggar's for it, you can take my word."

"Well, thank Gawd 'e ain't a-goin' to 'ack me about," returned the other. "Pack o' butchers, all the lot of 'em, if they gets 'alf a chance."

Unconscious of having been the cause of this somewhat drastic criticism of his profession, the famous surgeon mounted rapidly to the second landing, where a long, bare, distempered corridor

stretched away in either direction. Choosing the one on the left, he came to a halt in front of a white door, on which the two words "House Surgeon" were neatly painted in black letters, and, without troubling to knock, turned the handle and walked in.

A broad-shouldered, cheerful-looking young man, who was sitting at the table reading a medical book, glanced up carelessly at his entrance. On seeing who the visitor was his expression changed, and with a certain air of surprise he rose quickly to his feet.

"Hallo, Sir George!" he exclaimed. "We weren't expecting you this morning."

The elder man stepped forward and offered his hand.

"Sorry to interrupt your studies, Gray," he said, smiling. "This isn't an official visit. I've just looked in on a little private and personal matter."

The young house surgeon pulled forward a tattered arm-chair.

"Well, I'm delighted to see you, sir," he said heartily. "Won't you take a pew?"

Sir George sat down, and, leaning forward, helped himself to a cigarette from the box which his companion offered him.

"You were telling me about your plans a week or two ago," he said. "Have you come to any decision yet?"

Gray, who was standing with his back to the fire-place, nodded his head.

"Yes," he answered. "I've made up my mind

to send in my resignation as soon as the secretary comes back. I can't help feeling that I'm wasting my time here. I have always meant to go in for research work, and if I'm to do any good at it it's quite time I started." He laughed a little awkwardly. "I hope it doesn't sound conceited, talking like this, sir, but I really believe I've got a turn in that direction."

Sir George looked up at him with a friendly, half-quizzical twinkle in his eye.

"You needn't apologise, my boy," he said gravely. "I don't think anyone would accuse you of having a swelled head." He paused. "If it doesn't sound an impertinent question, may I ask how you are situated with regard to money matters?"

"I can manage all right," replied the other. "I've got a small private income of about three hundred a year. I should have to give up the car, of course, but one can't expect luxuries if one goes in for laboratory work."

Sir George nodded his head approvingly.

"That's the proper frame of mind, anyhow," he observed. "There's no half-and-half business about science. It's a great game if you're prepared to give up everything else to it, but if you want money and comfort and reputation—well, you'd better copy my example and spend your time cutting out the entrails of over-fed millionaires." He flicked the ash off his cigarette, and, sinking back

again in the chair, crossed his legs. "All the same," he added, "it just happens that I might be able to put something in your way which would make it poss ble for you to keep the car and hunt bugs at the same time."

Gray's boyish face lit up with sudden interest.

"By Jove, sir!" he exclaimed. "That sounds promising!"

"How would you like to go and live with old Carter as a sort of residential assistant?"

"Carter?" Gray repeated the name almost reverently. "Do you mean Professor Carter?"

"Of course I do. You don't suppose I'm referring to the man who makes the liver pills?"

You can bet I should like it all right," was the eager reply. "Why, it's a chance for which any chap in my position would sell his soul."

The surgeon smiled again at his young companion's enthusiasm.

"Well, I think it might be arranged on less dramatic terms than that. As a matter of fact, I was talking to the old boy last night. He doesn't often show up in public nowadays, but he happened to come along to a special meeting at the Board of Health, and he and I had a long yarn together. Amongst other things he asked me if I knew a young fellow who'd make a suitable assistant. He wants someone to live in the house, and he told me that if he could find the right man he was prepared

to pay a salary of four hundred a year. That, of course, would be in addition to living expenses."

"Four hundred a year!" echoed Gray in astonishment.

"Oh, he can afford it well enough. He's rolling in money, and he never spends a bob on anything, except his work."

"Why, he can take his pick amongst the best-trained men in England," declared Gray. "They'd simply fall over themselves to get in with Carter, whether there's a salary attached to it or not."

"That may be the case," assented Sir George dryly, "but, as it happens, very few of them possess the particular qualification on which the Professor insists. You see, he wants someone who's an expert boxer as well as being a fully qualified scientist."

Gray stared at his visitor in utter bewilderment.

"Sounds a bit comic, doesn't it?" pursued the latter tranquilly. "The fact is the old gentleman's suffering from nerves. About nine weeks ago his house on Campden Hill was broken into by burglars, and ever since then he seems to have been living in a mortal funk that the same thing would happen again."

"But hasn't he anyone in the place besides himself?" demanded Gray.

"Only a couple of women who cook for him and look after the house. He had an old servant for about forty years, but I think he's pensioned him

off. Of course, it really isn't very safe as things are. Carter must be over eighty, and the Red Lodge is a devilish lonely place, shut in behind a high wall amongst a lot of trees. I don't wonder he feels a bit jumpy."

"But is he quite serious about wanting an assistant?" demanded Gray. "At present it sounds as if he were in more need of a bulldog."

Sir George laughed. "It's a genuine enough offer," he said. "He confided to me that he'd just undertaken some very important researches, and that it was absolutely necessary he should have a first-class man to help him. I thought of you at once. I said all the complimentary things I could about your work, and I added, as a sort of little extra inducement, that you'd won the inter-hospital heavy-weight boxing competition for two years in succession."

Gray coloured modestly. "It was awfully good of you, Sir George," he replied.

"Not at all," was the answer. "In my opinion he'll be very lucky if he gets you. I told him I'd look you up and see how you felt about it, and that if you liked the idea I'd let him know some time to-day."

"I shall be ready to go directly I can get away from the hospital," declared Gray.

Sir George Onslow threw away the stump of his cigarette and rose to his feet.

"I don't think there will be any difficulty about

that. I'll speak to the chairman personally, and if Carter wants you at once we can easily find someone to carry on until the secretary comes back." He glanced at his watch. "I must be running along now. I've got to be at the nursing home by twelve-thirty."

After expressing his gratitude once more, Gray accompanied his visitor down to the hall, where he remained standing on the steps until the car drove away. He was just turning back towards the staircase when the porter, who was engaged with the telephone, thrust his head out of the box.

"Gen'leman wants to speak to you, sir—a Mister Ashton."

Gray walked forward and picked up the receiver. "Hallo!" he observed encouragingly.

"Hallo!" came the answer. "That you, Colin?"

"Of course it's me."

"Mark speaking—Mark Ashton. Are you engaged for lunch?"

"Not if I can get anyone else to pay for it," was the candid reply.

"Well, how would you like to come along and feed with me at the Savoy Grill?"

"I've no particular objection. What's the matter? Have you come into money?"

There was a chuckle at the other end of the wire.

"Nothing like that. Just a sudden thirst for your society."

"It shall be gratified," said Gray. "What time shall I show up?"

"One o'clock. Suit you all right?"

"Excellently."

"That'll do then. If you get there first, order yourself a cocktail."

The speaker rang off, and, replacing the receiver, Gray glanced at his watch.

It was a few minutes past twelve, and, being the day on which he was off duty, there was nothing to prevent him leaving the hospital as soon as he pleased. The prospect of a two-mile walk before lunch distinctly appealed to him, so, remounting the stairs to his small bedroom at the top of the building, he proceeded to change out of his white surgeon's kit into something a little more in harmony with the best traditions of a fashionable restaurant.

At exactly five minutes to one he passed through the revolving glass door of the Savoy and entered the already crowded lounge. Before he had time to glance round, a man, who had been sitting in the farther corner, rose to his feet and came forward to meet him.

No one, not even a newspaper reporter, would have called Mark Ashton handsome. In spite of his roughly cut features, his untidy hair, his badly fitting frock-coat, and his large gold-rimmed spectacles, there was, however, such a genuine and friendly air about his whole appearance that anybody except a fool would have been attracted by him at

once. Somehow or other he reminded one of a large, shaggy, good-tempered dog.

He came up to Gray and shook him heartily by the hand.

"This is splendid, Colin," he said. "I'm awfully glad you were able to manage it."

"So am I," returned his guest. "It would have broken my heart to refuse an invitation like this."

Mark grinned broadly, and, thrusting his arm through his companion's, piloted him across the lounge in the direction of the grill-room door.

"I've ordered a table," he announced, "so unless you'd rather wait a bit we may as well have lunch right away."

"That will suit me," said Colin cheerfully. "I breakfasted at eight, and I've just walked up from the hospital."

Following an obsequious gentleman, who apparently recognised Mark, they threaded their way through the room and took their places at a small table in the opposite corner, which looked out into the courtyard.

Mark picked up the menu and studied it with some care.

"What do you say about oysters to start with?" he suggested. "A dozen oysters each and a bottle of Chablis?"

"It's a good idea," admitted Colin. "Especially the Chablis."

"We can discuss what we'll have afterwards while

we're eating them," continued his host. He gave the order, and, as the waiter departed, he sat back in his chair and took a genial survey of the restaurant.

"What is the precise meaning of this debauch?" inquired Colin. "Is it your birthday or have you been backing the winner of the Cesarewitch?"

The other laughed good-naturedly. "I told you over the telephone. It's just a case of a hard-working East End doctor snatching a brief interval from his practice to enjoy the society of his most brilliant and distinguished pupil." He paused. "As a matter of fact," he added, "the whole thing was Mary's notion. I wanted to have a talk with you, and she suggested that I should take a couple of hours off and invite you to lunch."

"Mary's a great woman," said Colin with feeling. "Why didn't you bring her along with you?"

"She's stopped behind to console the patients. I shall have scores of 'em hanging round the surgery when I get back." He sighed heavily.

"Well, cheer up," said Colin. "By the time we've finished lunch they'll probably be dead." He helped himself to a roll, and, breaking off a bit of the crust, proceeded to nibble it thoughtfully. "What did you want to see me about?" he inquired.

Mark paused, while two waiters, who had suddenly appeared with the oysters and the Chablis, hovered round the table, intent on their ministrations.

"It's nothing much," he replied eventually. "I

was wondering if by any chance you could find me a girl."

"Find you a girl?" echoed Colin. "Why, you old Mormon, you've got Mary already."

"That's just the trouble," was the depressed answer. "Mary has to go off to Lincoln for a month to nurse her mother. After next Wednesday I shall be a grass widower."

Colin looked at him with genuine sympathy. "My poor lad!" he exclaimed. "This is indeed a blow!"

"It's worse than that," observed his companion. "It's—it's a damned knock-out. She's never been away from me for more than a day, not since we went down to Shadwell. Heaven only knows how I shall get on without her. She answers the letters, keeps the accounts, pays the bills, mixes the medicines——"

"In fact," broke in Colin, "to put it plainly, she's a darn sight more important to the business than you are." He speared a recalcitrant oyster and sprinkled it with red pepper. "I wonder you let her go," he added mischievously. "Why don't you take up the strong, silent husband stunt and refuse to allow it?"

"Oh, I can't do that," objected Mark. "You see, the old lady really is very seedy. She's going to have an operation in about a month's time, and meanwhile she's got to keep to her bed. She's simply set her heart on having Mary to come and

look after her, and I couldn't be such an utterly selfish pig as to go and put any difficulties in the way."

"No, I don't suppose you could," admitted Colin. "That sort of thing requires a lot of practice."

"We've talked it over," continued Mark, "and we've decided that the best plan would be to try and find some nice, sensible girl who'd come in for the day and make herself generally useful. Of course, it isn't exactly easy to get hold of the right person. I want a really capable, honest, pleasant girl, who can type and keep accounts, and who'll take a kind of personal interest in the whole show."

"You don't want much," observed Colin dryly.

"Well, I'm prepared to pay for it, and if she turned out to be any use I'd keep her on permanently. I've been meaning to do something of the sort for the last six months. Mary's been working far too hard, and I'm making such a sinful amount of money I can quite well afford a little extra help." He pushed away his empty oyster shells and beckoned to the waiter. "We'd better order some more grub, eh? Can you manage a cold grouse?"

"With ease," said Colin.

He remained silent until the man had departed, and then, picking up the Chablis, refilled his glass.

"But where do I come in?" he inquired. "You're not expecting me to produce angels out of my waistcoat pocket?"

"We thought you might be able to recommend

somebody. Mary said that a young, dashing, good-looking fellow like you——"

"She was pulling your leg," protested Colin. "She knows perfectly well that I'm terrified of girls."

"How about the hospital? Haven't you a pretty, intelligent nurse who'd like a nice Christian home?"

"I've never noticed her if we have." He paused as the recollection of his conversation with Sir George Onslow suddenly flashed into his mind. "By Jove!" he added. "That reminds me. I haven't told you my great news yet. I'm chucking the hospital and going as bottle-washer to old Carter."

His companion stared at him half incredulously.

"Is this a fact?" he demanded.

"Well, it's practically settled. I've had nothing to do with it really; Onslow's worked the whole thing for me. I'd just finished talking to him when you rang up."

In a few words he described his interview with Sir George, and the curious information which the latter had given him with regard to the Professor's requirements.

"I can't say if I shall fit the bill," he added, laughing, "but if the old boy takes a fancy to me I don't care how many damned burglars he has. I'd tackle half a dozen a night for the sake of being his assistant."

"It's a wonderful chance," admitted Mark thoughtfully. "Carter may be a little queer, but there's no doubt that he's the greatest man at his game in the world." He looked across rather wistfully into the strong, smiling face opposite him. "You're a fortunate young devil, Colin," he added. "Nature's presented you with practically everything a man can want—brains, good looks, and the strength of a cart-horse—and now I'm hanged if you're not going to be lucky as well. I'd have given my head for an opening like this when I was your age. Just fancy being able to devote one's life to science instead of wasting it in the futile way I've done."

"You're talking through your hat," protested Colin indignantly. "If you chose you could be sitting in an arm-chair in Harley Street, but instead of that you and Mary live down there in Shadwell and sweat your souls out amongst the poorest of the poor. Don't you call that good work?"

"Splendid," agreed Mark. "Stuffing 'em up with coloured water and ginger pills and making fifteen hundred a year out of the poor blighters for doing it." He smiled with a cheerful good nature that was rather out of keeping with his words. "I'm not envious, Colin. I'm only too delighted to know that you've found the right opening. Two or three years' experience with Carter will be simply invaluable to you. It will put you in the very front rank of investigators, and what's more, it will give you the

opportunity of carrying on his work after he's dead. You'll be a great man before you've finished. When I'm an old buffer of eighty I shall probably go around bragging that the famous Sir Colin Gray was once my junior house surgeon at Barts."

"Always supposing," added the future celebrity, "that I'm not knocked on the head by a burglar." He rolled up a bread pill and eyed his host meditatively. "It's a rummy affair, the whole business," he continued. "I wonder if there's anything behind it? D'you think Carter's just got the wind up, or d'you think he's one of those old juggins who keeps thousands of pounds buried in the back cellar?"

Mark shrugged his shoulders. "Goodness knows," he replied. "Anyhow, he ought to be safe enough with you. If I were a self-respecting burglar with a proper regard for my appearance I should give the Red Lodge a devilish wide berth. I know that right upper-cut of yours; I've had some of it."

The appearance of the grouse at this point created a temporary diversion, and it was not until lunch was finished, and the two of them were sitting over their coffee and cigars, that Mark returned to his original subject.

"You won't forget, will you," he said, "if you run across a likely damsel. I shall be absolutely in the soup unless I get hold of somebody the next day or two."

"I'll do my best for you," Colin assured him. "I'll have a general inspection of all the nurses at the hospital to-morrow morning, and if there's a stray angel amongst them I'll send her along. I shouldn't bank on it though, not from what I remember of them."

Mark pulled out his note-case and beckoned to the waiter.

"I must be off," he observed resentfully. "Which way are you going—back to the hospital?"

Colin shook his head. "This is my day out. I shall roll along to the garage and spend a nice messy afternoon tinkering at the car. There are several odd jobs that want doing, and I should like to get them cleared off before I start chasing burglars."

Mark paid the bill, and, leaving the restaurant, the two friends walked together as far as Charing Cross Underground, where they came to a halt on the bridge inside the barrier.

"Well, thanks for an excellent lunch," said Colin, shaking his host's hand. "Remember that if you ever want my advice it's always available on the same terms."

Mark grinned. "You must come down and thank Mary," he said. "It was she who suggested the Savoy. If it had been left to me I should probably have taken you to Lockhart's."

As he spoke an East End train clanked noisily out of the opposite tunnel, and with a hurried good-bye he darted away towards the steps and disappeared from view.

About twenty minutes later, with the stump of a cigar in his mouth, and feeling remarkably at peace with the world, Colin emerged from Sloane Square Station and strolled across the pavement in the direction of the barracks.

He kept his car in a small garage at the bottom of Church Street, a place which, in addition to being cheap and within easy reach of the hospital, also possessed the unusual distinction of having an honest proprietor. It was about three-quarters of a mile from the Square, but as he was in no hurry, and the weather was extraordinarily genial for an afternoon in late November, he dismissed his first intention of taking a motor-bus and started off at a leisurely pace along the King's Road.

He had got as far as the corner of Radnor Street when his progress was suddenly arrested by a muffled outbreak of shouts and oaths. The next moment the door of a small public-house opposite burst violently open, and from its gas-lit interior a tangled cluster of struggling men swayed out into the main thoroughfare. One of them was evidently a policeman, for his blue helmet was clearly visible in the centre of the mêlée.

For a second or two the whole mass reeled backwards and forwards, then a stick swung up into the air, and, coming down with crashing force on the back of the constable's head, stretched him out an inert mass in the gutter.

HOWEVER underpaid it may be, the training of a house surgeon at a London hospital induces a certain readiness of action. Before any of the other passers-by had ceased to gape helplessly at this unusual spectacle Colin was half-way across the street.

Quick as he was, however, the situation had already developed. A big, burly man, clutching another by the collar, had staggered back against the wall of the pub, where, with his disengaged arm, he was endeavouring to defend himself as best he could against a rain of blows and kicks.

Striking out mercilessly right and left, Colin forced his way through the gang. He was only just in time, for exactly as he arrived a vicious kick in the ribs sent the big stranger sprawling to the pavement, his fingers still gripping the collar of his half-throttled prisoner.

The man who had laid him out—a truculent-looking scoundrel in a blue suit—was stepping in to complete his work when a smashing swing from Colin caught him full in the mouth. Reeling back from the blow, he collided violently with one of his friends, and for a second the whole attacking party were thrown into confusion.

Before they could recover the shrill note of a

police whistle rang out close behind them. They all spun round instinctively, and through a gap in their ranks Colin caught sight of the slim figure of a girl stooping over the prostrate body of the constable. It was only a brief glimpse, for the next moment one of the ruffians sprang backwards and lashed out at her with his belt. Dropping the whistle, she sank forward on to her knees, and with a wild, clattering rush the entire gang took to their heels.

In two strides Colin was at the girl's side. He was not easily upset, but the sight of that cowardly blow had filled him with such a sudden wave of fury that he found it difficult to control his voice as he bent down over the crouching figure.

"Are you much hurt?" he asked.

She raised her head, and a pair of beautiful but rather bewildered blue eyes looked up into his.

"No," she said. "I don't think I am. Is it all over?"

In spite of his anger Colin began to laugh.

"Yes," he said, "it's all over. They've bolted like a lot of rabbits, thanks to you."

He took her by the arm, and, a trifle unsteadily, she scrambled to her feet.

"How do you feel?" he asked with some anxiety. "I was horribly afraid he'd hit you on the head."

"So he did," was the answer, "but luckily for me I've got a good deal of protection."

She lifted off the small velvet hat that she was wearing, and rather tenderly patted the thick coils

of dark red hair which gleamed like copper in the fading November sunlight. "The queer thing is," she added, "that it hasn't even given me a headache."

"I wish I'd known you were all right," said Colin ruefully. "I'd have gone after the brute and wrung his neck."

"You didn't do so badly as it was, mister," observed a voice at his elbow, and, turning round sharply, he found himself face to face with the burly stranger, whom he had last seen scuffling on the pavement. Except for a slight trickle of blood from the corner of his mouth the latter looked none the worse for his adventures.

"I owe something both to you and to this young lady," he continued. "If you hadn't come along just when you did I'd probably have got my head kicked in."

"You needn't thank me," protested Colin. "There's nothing I enjoy better than a good scrap."

He glanced round the late field of battle with a certain amount of amused curiosity. Three fresh and energetic-looking policemen had already appeared. One of them was grasping the arm of the now handcuffed prisoner, a second knelt beside the body of his injured comrade, while the third, with that scant ceremony which distinguishes the Metropolitan force, was thrusting back a rapidly increasing throng of interested spectators.

"What's it all about?" asked Colin.

Rummaging in his waistcoat pocket, the big man produced a dilapidated card.

"You'll see my name there," he said. "Inspector Marsden of the C.I.D." He jerked his head in the direction of the captive—a short, sandy-haired individual with a face like a rather disagreeable ferret. "You've helped us to get hold of a gentleman we've been wanting badly at the Yard for the last two months. That's 'Ginger Dick,' the leader of the toughest race-course gang in England."

"He must be fairly popular with his friends," observed Colin. "At least, they seemed quite anxious not to lose his society."

The Inspector smiled grimly. "You don't know 'em, sir. You can take it from me that all they're worrying about is whether he's going to split on 'em. There isn't a man in that crowd who wouldn't sell his own mother." He moved over to the second constable, who was still busy with his unconscious mate. "What's the damage?" he asked. "Anything serious?"

Colin stepped across after him. "You'd better let me have a look," he said. "I'm a doctor."

The two men at once made way, and, kneeling down in the gutter, he rapidly examined his patient's condition.

"You must get him to hospital as quick as you can," he said, looking up at the Inspector. "He's had a pretty bad crack on the head, and the sooner he's under treatment the better." He rose to his

feet and brushed off the dust from his trousers. "Take him along to St. Christopher's," he added. "Tell them that Dr. Gray sent you, and that it's a case which requires immediate attention."

The Inspector nodded, and, having dispatched one of his assistants to fetch an ambulance, turned back and addressed himself to the girl.

"You'll pardon me for not having thanked you before, miss," he said. "I never saw anything pluckier in my life than the way you chipped in and blew that whistle. There's not one young lady in a thousand who'd have had the nerve to do it."

The recipient of his praises coloured delicately.

"If you don't mind," he continued, "I'll make a note of your name and address. We might be glad of your evidence, and I know the Commissioner would like to write you a little letter to send you his official thanks."

"Oh, he mustn't trouble to do that," objected the girl hastily. "I'm sure he's frightfully busy, and, after all, it's quite easy just to blow a whistle."

Colin laughed. "You can't get out of it," he said. "Still, if you'll tell the Inspector your name and where you live I don't suppose he'll bother you to give evidence unless it's absolutely necessary."

"You can count on that, miss," remarked the other reassuringly.

"Well, I live just round the corner at No. 46 Jubilee Place," said the girl, "and my name's Seymour—Miss Nancy Seymour."

The Inspector committed this information to an official-looking pocket-book, and then held out his hand to Colin.

"I shan't forget that you've saved my life, doctor," he said. "I hope that next time you're up in our direction you'll look in and pay us a visit." He paused. "And remember," he added, "that if there's ever any little way in which we can be of use to you, you've only got to let us know. We like to pay our debts at the Yard when we get the opportunity."

"I shall remember," said Colin, smiling. "It might come in handy one of these days."

He stepped forward as a movement amongst the onlookers heralded the approach of the ambulance, and, after assisting to lift the injured constable inside, came back to where the girl was standing.

"Can I see you as far as your house?" he asked. "I don't suppose any of those blackguards are still hanging about, but there's no point in running risks."

"Thank you," she said simply. "I should be very grateful if you would."

Under a fire of curious glances they pushed their way through the crowd and started off along the pavement in the direction of Jubilee Place.

Colin was the first to break the silence.

"Where did you spring from?" he asked. "I never saw you until you blew the whistle."

"I had just come out to buy a stamp," replied

his companion. "I was walking peacefully along the King's Road when I suddenly found myself right in the middle of it."

"Well, you've got some pluck," said Colin admiringly. "That Inspector was quite right in what he said. Most girls would have given a shriek and flopped down in the gutter."

She coloured again in the same attractive fashion as before.

"It wasn't a question of pluck," she objected. "I acted entirely from impulse. If I had had time to think I should probably have done what you say." She stopped short with a little gesture of annoyance. "Oh dear, how stupid I am! I've quite forgotten to buy the stamp after all."

"It doesn't matter," said Colin. "I've got one in my pocket I can let you have."

They turned up a narrow street with some white buildings on one side of it, and at the door of the second house the girl halted.

"This is where I live," she said. "It was awfully kind of you to walk back with me."

"Not a bit," said Colin. "I'm very fond of a little gentle exercise." He pulled out a note-case and began to search through its various compartments. "If you'll wait half a minute," he added, "I'll see if I can find you that stamp."

She stood watching him with a certain look of indecision in her face.

"I don't know if you'd care to come in," she

said rather hesitatingly. "I have only got a small studio, but I can at least offer you a cup of tea."

Colin unearthed the stamp and presented it to her in triumph.

"If you're quite certain I shan't be a nuisance," he said, "I should like it immensely. Fighting in the street always gives me a thirst."

Miss Nancy Seymour's blue eyes twinkled merrily, and, inserting a Yale key into the lock, she led the way up a small winding staircase to a door on the first landing.

"You mustn't mind if it's not very tidy," she remarked apologetically. "I have been typing all the morning, and I've not had time to put things straight."

She opened the door, and, following her inside, Colin found himself in an oddly shaped but rather attractive apartment, the principal feature of which was a big glass skylight, shaped like a coach-house roof.

The furniture was scanty, consisting chiefly of a low, comfortable-looking couch, a couple of old Windsor arm-chairs, and a stout deal table, which at some remote period had evidently been stained brown. On the latter stood a Remington typewriter, flanked by a litter of loose sheets and several piles of badly written manuscript.

The farther corner of the room was curtained off, as though to serve the purpose of a kitchen or bedroom.

With a wave of her hand Nancy indicated the couch.

"Try my patent sofa," she said hospitably. "I'll tidy up while the kettle's boiling."

"Don't do it for me," protested Colin. "I like to see a room a little topsy-turvy. You can't think how refreshing it seems after the suffocating neatness of a hospital."

"I'll put away these horrible manuscripts at all events," returned his hostess. "I have been working at them ever since nine o'clock. The mere sight of them makes me feel ill."

"What are they?" inquired Colin.

She made as near an approach to a grimace as Nature would allow.

"Stories. And such bad ones! I think that all the worst authors in the world must live in Chelsea."

"It was rather unkind to type them out," observed Colin. "Somebody will probably have to read them now."

Nancy laughed. "Unfortunately," she said, "it happens to be my profession."

She covered up the typewriter and collected all the papers into an indiscriminate bundle.

"I shan't be long," she added, moving away towards the curtain. "Make yourself comfortable, and please smoke if you want to."

Accepting both these invitations, Colin lighted a cigarette and took up a restful position on the couch. He felt curiously at home, considering the novelty

of his surroundings, but the whole affair had been so unusual that somehow or other this impromptu tea-party seemed to constitute a natural and appropriate climax.

That it would also turn out to be an extremely entertaining one he had no manner of doubt. Whoever Miss Nancy Seymour might be, she was certainly the most attractive girl he had ever met in his life. Her looks alone were sufficient to arouse anybody's enthusiasm. With her vividly coloured hair and almost forget-me-not blue eyes she possessed that sort of inspiriting beauty which Rossetti in his healthier and happier moments would have revelled in painting.

But, delightful as Colin found her appearance, there was something still more fascinating to him in the unaffected simplicity and friendliness of her manner. What he had said to Mark about his knowledge of women was perfectly true. As a medical student he had worked exceptionally hard, and this fact, combined with his devotion to football and boxing, had left him little time to cultivate any of those semi-amorous friendships which seem to be the principal hobby of so many budding physicians. It was, in fact, the first time that he had ever been perfectly at ease in a girl's society, and the sensation was so pleasing that he felt no objection to its indefinite extension.

He could hear Nancy moving about behind the curtain, the pop of a gas ring and the chink of cups

giving some clue to the nature of her activities. Six or seven minutes must have elapsed, however, before she made her reappearance, this time carrying a tray with all the necessary equipment for tea. She had discarded her hat and coat, and in her simple indoor costume Colin thought that she looked prettier than ever.

"Don't get up," she said, as he started to rise to his feet. "I'll bring over that other little table and then we can help ourselves."

Suiting the action to the word, she deposited the tray on the end of the sofa, and pulled up a sort of rickety three-legged stool which looked like the final effort of some disillusioned amateur carpenter.

"It's all rather primitive," she continued, "but you must pretend not to notice. You see, I've had to furnish the place myself, and I've never yet had enough money to do it properly."

Colin looked round with a contented eye. "I don't see what more you want," he observed, "not unless you're naturally luxurious."

"I expect that must be it," she replied, pouring out the tea. "Anyhow, I know that directly I can afford it I mean to buy some new curtains and also a nice thick velvety carpet from Harrods." She smiled. "That won't be for some time though—not unless there's a boom in bad stories."

"If it isn't an impertinent question," said Colin, "how long have you been in Chelsea?"

"About eighteen months," she answered, handing

him his cup. "I had always lived in the country before then, but there were reasons why I had to start work of some sort, and typing was the only useful thing I happened to know. Somebody told me that Chelsea was full of authors, so I came here, and here I've been ever since."

Colin helped himself to a sugared biscuit. "I hope you charge them a lot," he said, "and I hope they pay regularly."

"It might be worse," she replied. "As it happens, I've got enough money of my own to pay the rent of the studio, and what I make out of my typing just keeps me going in clothes and food and cigarettes." She paused to refill the teapot. "It's just the feeling that I'm wasting my time so," she continued, "that annoys me. If I were working at something really useful I should be quite happy, but this stuff"—she made a distasteful gesture towards the table—"well, I can't think how anybody can possibly write it, let alone read it."

Colin suddenly slapped his leg with a bang which made the china rattle.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "Why, of course, you're the very girl!"

He laid down his cup, and gazed at her in a kind of triumphant satisfaction.

Nancy returned his inspection with a perplexed smile. "I dare say I am," she admitted. "It's rather hard to tell at present, isn't it?"

Colin laughed. "I'm not mad," he explained.

"If you meant what you said just now, if you're really looking out for something that's worth doing, I can put you on to a job straight away."

There was a moment's silence.

"It's very nice of you," said Nancy. "The only question is that I should probably be quite unqualified for it."

"On the contrary," retorted Colin, "you're the exact person that I've been commissioned to find."

"It must be a queer sort of job then," remarked Nancy, still smiling. "All you know about me at present is that I can type, make tea, and blow a police whistle."

"Well, there you are," observed her guest. "It's just that all-round sort of ability that Mark wants."

He sat back against the wall, and, without any further delay, proceeded to enter into a full description of the distressing problem which overhung the Shadwell *ménage*.

"If you'll chip in and fill the gap," he continued, "you'll be doing a real Christian act. Mark jeers at his own work, but, as a matter of cold fact, he and Mary have buried themselves down in that beastly slum out of sheer good nature. They're the sort of people you don't meet twice in a lifetime. Mark's a brick, and Mary's just the sweetest and most unselfish woman that ever trod this earth."

"They sound perfect dears," said Nancy. "I should love to know them whether I get the job or not."

"Get the job!" repeated Colin. "Why, good Lord, they'll simply be all over you as soon as you show yourself."

Nancy's blue eyes gleamed merrily. "You seem to forget, Dr. Gray," she said, "everybody isn't quite so rapid and trustful as you are. They might, for instance, like to know something about me first."

"Well, you can tell 'em," replied Colin. "You haven't been in prison, have you, or anything of that sort? Not that Mark would mind a bit if you had."

"What a nice, obliging man!" was the answer. "No, I haven't been in prison, and I don't think I've ever done anything to deserve it. All the same, if anyone offered me an engagement they would have to take me absolutely on trust. You see, I have never earned a salary before, so I've got no testimonials."

"Yes, you have," objected Colin. "You've got mine and the policeman's. That ought to be enough for any reasonable employer." He glanced at his watch. "Look here," he added eagerly, "if you're doing nothing in particular why shouldn't we go down there straight away? Mark usually takes half an hour off for tea about four o'clock, so we should just catch them at the right time."

"How does one get to Shadwell?" asked Nancy. "I don't even know where it is."

Colin jumped up briskly. "I'll drive you

down," he said. "I've got a little car in Church Street. I was just going along there to do some repairs."

Nancy made a movement of protest. "Oh, but, please——" she said. "I don't want to take up all your afternoon—not if you're busy."

"That's all right," observed Colin. "You shove on your hat and coat. I shall have plenty of time to tinker at the car when we get back."

With an air of resigned amusement Nancy rose to her feet.

"I am trusting entirely to you, Dr. Gray," she said. "If your friends throw me out ignominiously I shan't be the least surprised."

She collected the tea-things, and, crossing the room to the further corner, disappeared again behind the curtain.

After a surprisingly short interval she returned, ready dressed for the journey.

"You look ripping," said Colin, eyeing her with frank approval. "I'm longing to see old Mark's face when he hears you're his new secretary."

"Well, it's more than I am," remarked Nancy.

She paused for a second or two to make a final inspection of herself in the looking-glass, and then, following her guest out on to the landing, closed and locked the door behind her.

They descended the staircase, and were just emerging into the street, when a big white Daimler swung into view round the corner of the King's Road.

Nancy uttered a little exclamation which sounded like one of annoyance, but before she could speak the driver turned in towards the pavement and drove up alongside of them. He proved to be a tall, clean-shaven, middle-aged man, with rather dissipated blue eyes.

"Hallo, young lady," he said raising his hat, "where are you off to? I was coming along to take you out for a drive."

Nancy acknowledged his greeting without any apparent enthusiasm.

"It was very kind of you," she replied, "but I am afraid I can't manage it to-day. I have promised to go out to tea with some friends of Dr. Gray's." She paused for a moment, and then glanced hesitatingly from one to the other of them. "Let me introduce you," she added. "Dr. Gray—Major Fenton."

The two men nodded to each other.

"It will do you much more good to come for a spin," persisted the new arrival. "Besides, I understood that we more or less fixed it up last Thursday."

"Did we?" said Nancy coolly. "I don't remember actually mentioning the day."

"Well, I understood so anyhow," returned the other. He leaned across and opened the door. "Come along," he added persuasively. "I am sure Dr. Gray will excuse you."

"I have no doubt he would," said Nancy, "but,

as it happens, I particularly want to meet his friends." She held out a small gloved hand, which the other accepted with obvious reluctance. "You must really excuse me, Major Fenton," she continued. "I can't possibly manage to come to-day, though I am very much obliged to you for offering to take me."

Except for an ugly glint in his blue eyes, the owner of the car managed to control his emotions.

"Oh, very well," he said, with a rather forced laugh, "if you're really booked up, of course that settles it. We must make it another day instead, eh? How about to-morrow?"

"To-morrow would be all right," said Nancy, "as far as I know at present."

"I'll call for you at the same time, then—say three o'clock, or perhaps we'd better make it a quarter past." He lifted his hat again, and, after bestowing a curt nod on Colin, leaned over and closed the door of the car. The next moment he was moving away rapidly up the street.

Nancy gave a sigh of relief.

"I'm glad you were with me," she said, as they started off in the opposite direction. "If I had been alone I couldn't very well have got out of it."

Colin looked at her in surprise. "Why on earth should you go if you don't want to?" he asked. "Is that truculent warrior your guardian or what?"

Nancy shook her head. "I don't know anything about him," she answered, "except that he

happens to be an old friend of my father's." She paused for an instant as they turned the corner into King's Road. "You see, I am rather alone in the world," she continued. "My father and mother both died when I was a baby, and as Major Fenton took the trouble to come and hunt me out about two months ago I didn't like to seem ungrateful."

There was a touch of wistfulness in her voice which went straight to Colin's heart.

"Of course, that's different," he said gently. "It's rotten bad luck to be left all by oneself. Haven't you any relations or people of that sort?"

"None that I ever heard of," was the answer. "My father and mother were living in a little village in Cornwall, and one day they were caught in a storm out sailing, and they were both drowned. No one seemed to know anything about them at all. A lawyer at Helston, a very kind man called Mr. Penwarren, advertised in the papers and made inquiries everywhere. They all led to nothing, however, and it ended with my going to live with an old farmer and his wife who had offered to take care of me. There was a little money—something like nine hundred pounds—which Mr. Penwarren had invested for me, and that gave me the chance of coming to London and setting up as a typist." She stopped short, and glanced at Colin with a sudden trace of embarrassment. "I don't know why I am

telling you all this," she added. " I'm afraid I must be boring you horribly."

Colin shook his head. " I never felt more interested in my life. I thought that things like that only happened in books and plays."

" I wish they did," said Nancy. " I simply hate not knowing who I am. It makes one feel like a lost dog."

" But how about our genial friend in the car ? " inquired Colin. " If he was a pal of your father's he must surely have been able to give you some information."

" That's just what he can't do," said Nancy. " He met my father years ago down at Porth Leven, where they used to go out fishing together. He went abroad with his regiment after that, and it was only when he came home this spring and happened to be in the same neighbourhood that he found out about the accident. He took the trouble to go over to Helston and see the lawyer, Mr. Penwarren, who gave him my address. I can't imagine why he should have bothered about me at all, but for some extraordinary reason he seems to have thought it was his duty. Anyhow, he has certainly gone out of his way to try and be kind to me, and although I don't like him I naturally feel a certain amount of gratitude. He must be rather a nice man really or he wouldn't have behaved as he has."

" I dare say you're right," said Colin doubtfully.

" I have been told that the most objectionable people often have hearts of gold."

He piloted her round the corner of Church Street and led the way into a small garage, where a miscellaneous collection of cars was ranged along the walls.

" This is mine," he remarked, coming to a halt in front of a rather battered four-seater. " She's not a beauty to look at, but she can go like the devil."

Before Nancy could offer any comment a young man in dirty overalls wriggled out from beneath a neighbouring limousine.

Colin greeted him with a friendly nod.

" I am going to take her out after all, Davis," he said. " I shall be back some time this evening, and if you're here we can run over her together."

Mr. Davis wiped his hands upon a piece of cotton waste and glanced appreciatively at Nancy. " Very good, sir," he replied ; " but, if you'll excuse my saying so, I shouldn't drive too fast—not if you've got a lady with you. The steering gear's none too sound."

Colin laughed. " You needn't pay any attention to Davis," he observed to Nancy. " Like all people who have to give credit, he's a hopeless pessimist."

He opened the door for her, and, climbing up alongside into the driving seat, switched on the spark and the lamps.

With a slight shrug of his shoulders, as though to disclaim further responsibility, Mr. Davis bent

down over the starting-handle. After several ineffectual jerks the engine suddenly began running, and the next moment Colin was backing his way out through the open doorway.

Sitting beside him, with her chin buried comfortably inside her collar, Nancy made no attempt at conversation. From the hint dropped by Mr. Davis she concluded that Colin was the sort of driver whom it was safer not to disturb with unnecessary chatter, an opinion which had been fully confirmed some time before they arrived at Sloane Square.

He drove, indeed, at a pace which would have proved highly distressing to anyone of a timid disposition. Fortunately for Nancy, however, her nerves were in excellent order, and after the first half-mile had been safely negotiated she began to find that the sensation of missing buses by a quarter of an inch was not without a peculiar and exhilarating charm.

Apart from that, the actual journey through what to her was a totally unknown quarter of London was in itself a sufficiently stimulating experience. The crowds in the City, the flaring coster barrows in St. George's Road, and the gradually increasing squalor and gloom as they drew nearer to their destination, all provided her with an unfailing source of interest.

A little way down Shadwell High Street, at the corner of a side lane, Colin came to a halt in front of an uninviting looking public-house, alongside

which was a closed gate leading apparently into a yard.

"This is where I generally leave the car," he announced. "Mark's place is only a few yards farther on."

As he spoke the door of the pub opened, and a stout gentleman in trousers, carpet slippers, and a rather dirty shirt loomed up in the opening.

"'Ullo, Mister Gray," he observed, in a kind of hoarse wheeze. "Quite a stranger, ain't yer?"

He spat genially in the gutter, and, stepping forward, offered his hand to Colin.

"Brought a bit o' company with yer this time, I see," he added.

"That's right," said Colin. "Let me introduce you to each other. Mr. Higgins—Miss Seymour."

The fat man wiped his hand on the back of his trousers and transferred it to Nancy.

"Pleased to meet yer, miss," he remarked. "Any friend o' Mister Gray's a friend o' mine."

"Can I shove the car in your yard?" inquired Colin.

"Certainly, an' welcome," was the answer. "You sit where you are an' I'll open the gaite for yer."

He produced a key, and, having fumbled for a moment with the rusty padlock, disclosed the entrance to a narrow courtyard, the only occupant of which was a surly-looking, red-eyed bull-terrier, who was tethered to an empty barrel.

"She's as saife 'ere as in the perlice station,"

continued Mr. Higgins, as the car came to a standstill against the wall. "Saifer, I should say, from wot I seen o' some o' them cops."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Colin with a laugh. He switched off the engine, and, getting out of the car, proceeded to rid himself of his driving gloves. "I don't suppose we shall be very long," he added. "We're only going to have a cup of tea with the doctor."

"You'll find me inside, any'ow," returned Mr. Higgins. He stopped and fixed an admiring glance on Nancy, who was pleasantly employed in tickling the bull-terrier's left ear. "See that?" he continued with a chuckle. "Dang me if that don't taike the biscuit. Scratchin' of 'is head saime as if 'e was a little lamb."

"I always select my friends on account of their courage," explained Colin unconcernedly.

He strolled forward to the entrance, where Nancy joined him, and the two of them waited on the pavement while the gate was being refastened. Then, after declining the pressing offer of a little refreshment from Mr. Higgins, they strolled off again along the narrow and unsavoury thoroughfare which is the nearest approach that Shadwell can boast to a main street.

"You mustn't judge the place entirely by its smells and its appearance," said Colin. "You will probably find the people a bit rough at first, but they're a jolly friendly lot really, and they all adore

Mark. When they know you're working for him they'll be as nice to you as possible."

"Perhaps they won't have the chance," returned Nancy. "As I said before, the doctor may be one of those extraordinary people who expect to get something useful in return for their money."

"Well, we'll soon settle that point, anyway," observed Colin.

He pulled up in front of an old-fashioned two-story house, which had evidently survived from the days when Shadwell was more or less a country village. It stood a little way back from the street behind some battered iron railings, a brass plate on the door and a red lamp over the side entrance affording sufficient indications of its owner's profession.

Colin advanced to the front door and rang the bell.

Its jangling had hardly died away when there was a sound of footsteps inside, and the next moment a flood of light streamed out into the gloom.

A slim, sweet-faced woman, with beautiful but rather tired grey eyes, was standing on the mat.

As soon as she saw who it was her expression lit up in a smile of unaffected pleasure.

"Why, it's Colin!" she exclaimed. "How delightful! I thought it was someone cadging for subscriptions."

Colin shook his head. "It's not money we want,

lady," he said, "it's tea." He pulled Nancy forward into the light. "By the way, let me introduce Miss Nancy Seymour. Nancy—Mary; Mary—Nancy."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. Please forgive me. I thought you were alone." She pressed Nancy's hand in a friendly welcome, stepping back, shepherded them into the hall.

"Take Miss Seymour upstairs, Colin," she said. "You'll find Mark in the study. He's just finished work. You must excuse my deserting you for a moment. It's Martha Jane's day out, so I'm getting tea."

"Can I help?" inquired Nancy.

She shook her head with another smile. "Everything's ready," she answered. "You go along with Colin, and I'll be up in a minute. I've only got to fetch the crumpets."

She disappeared in the direction of the back regions, and having deposited his hat and coat on the hall table, Colin led the way upstairs.

As they reached the first landing a door on the right opened, and Mark himself appeared on the threshold. He had a large cherry-wood pipe in his mouth, and he had discarded his frock coat in favour of a Norfolk jacket.

"Hallo, Colin!" he exclaimed. "I thought I heard your musical voice. Why the devil——"

He stopped short as he suddenly caught sight of Nancy.

" You shouldn't swear in front of ladies," said Colin reprovingly. " It's not done in the best medical circles."

Mark came forward with an embarrassed air.

" I say, please excuse me," he stammered. " I didn't see there was anyone else there."

" It's all right," said Nancy, laughing. " I've heard the expression before—several times."

Colin looked at them both with mischievous amusement.

" Hadn't you better introduce us ? " suggested Mark. " It would be more useful than standing there like a grinning Cheshire cat."

" I didn't think it was necessary," said Colin. " Surely you've guessed that you're talking to the angel ? "

Mark stared at him in bewilderment.

" Talking to who ? " he inquired.

" The angel," repeated Colin. " You asked me to find you an angel, and here she is ! "

A sudden light seemed to break in upon their host's intelligence.

" By Jove ! " he exclaimed. " You don't say so ! Come long into the study."

He ushered them both into the snug, comfortably furnished room, lined all round with books, where a table was set out for tea and a bright fire was burning in the grate.

" Now, Colin," he demanded, " were you pulling my leg, or is this really a fact ? "

" Of course it's a fact," said Colin, " and a very nice one too."

" I can see that for myself," retorted Mark. He turned to Nancy and pushed forward a chair. " Do sit down," he added. " You must forgive my being rather stupid, but I really thought Colin was joking. You see, I only mentioned the matter to him a few hours ago."

" It doesn't take me long to do a little job like that," said Colin, " not when once I start on it."

Nancy was about to speak when she was interrupted by a plaintive request from outside that someone would open the door. Colin hastened to comply, and Mrs. Mark, carrying a teapot and a large covered plate, sailed smilingly into the room.

" Be careful of the crumpets, Colin," she said, as he relieved her of her burden. " I have done them with a double lot of butter in honour of your visit."

Mark laid his hand on his wife's shoulder.

" Mary," he said, wheeling her round so that she faced Nancy, " do you know who this is ? "

" Of course I do," was the answer. " We were introduced to each other on the doorstep. I had no idea that Colin had such nice friends."

" But you haven't heard the really thrilling part of it. This is the dream secretary who is going to get us out of all our troubles."

" Oh, how splendid ! " exclaimed Mary, but

before she could add anything further Nancy had rose to her feet with a little protesting gesture.

"Please," she said, "please! You're making me feel the most dreadful humbug and impostor!" She turned to Colin. "Do tell them the truth, Dr. Gray."

"I'm only waiting for the chance," said Colin.

With a good-natured chuckle Mark placed his pipe on the mantelpiece, and pulled up a couple of chairs to the table.

"Fire ahead, my lad," he observed. "That's to say, if you can eat crumpets and talk intelligibly at the same time."

Spurred on by this encouragement, Colin set about his task with obvious relish. He was a good hand at telling a story, and under his eloquent treatment the slightly unusual circumstances which had attended his first introduction to Nancy lost nothing in dramatic freshness. Retailed, indeed, amid the chink of teacups and the pleasant crackling of the wood fire, they seemed to appear more romantic than ever, and both Mark and Mary listened to him with a fascinated interest which showed itself plainly in their faces.

Having described the capture of "Ginger Dick," and done full justice to the spirited behaviour of Nancy during the operations, he went on to relate how he had walked back with her to the studio, and had been admitted into the secret of her profession.

"Of course," he finished, "directly I heard that

I knew where I was. You'd asked me to find you a resourceful angel, and here she was fluttering round Chelsea wasting her life typing out bad stories! The whole thing was evidently a put-up job on the part of Providence."

"It seems to me like a direct answer to prayer," said Mark, with considerable enthusiasm. "I can hardly believe it even now."

Mary leaned across and began refilling Nancy's cup. "My dear," she begged, "please say that it's true. You can't imagine how it will relieve our feelings. If Colin has been misrepresenting the situation I shall burst into floods of tears."

"I am afraid he has," declared Nancy, laughing, "but only with regard to my qualifications. If I really thought that I could be of any use to you, there's nothing I should like better than to come and work here."

Mark rose to his feet and brandished his teacup triumphantly over his head.

"This is magnificent," he exclaimed. "What the Prayer Book calls 'a happy issue out of all our afflictions.'"

His wife regarded him with an affectionate smile.

"You had better control your feelings, Mark," she said. "If you go on like that Miss Seymour will think you're mad, and she'll probably resign straight away." She turned to Nancy. "I should hate to say anything that could possibly put you off, but I think it's only fair to give you a word of

warning. You are so young and so pretty that it seems a shame you should bury yourself in Shadwell. We do our best to be cheerful, but, you know, a doctor's practice in the East End of London is nearly all hard work and no play. You will probably find it horribly depressing."

Nancy shook her head. "I am not afraid of that," she said. "I rather like hard work as long as it's useful. What I'm doubtful about is whether I can do what you want."

"Good Lord, yes," exclaimed Mark hastily. "It's only just a matter of common sense. Mary would put you up to the ropes in half an hour."

"What are you doing now?" suggested the latter. "Why don't you stay on here and have supper with us? There will be plenty of time before then to give you a rough idea of what the work is like, and we can settle up the whole thing straight away."

Nancy glanced at Colin. "It sounds a good idea," she agreed. "I suppose I can get home by train?"

"You won't have to worry about that," said Colin. "I'll take the car up to the garage and do my repairs, and then come down again and join you here."

In a half-humorous, half-wistful fashion Nancy looked round at all three of them.

"I am not used to people being so kind," she said. "Unless somebody's disagreeable soon I am afraid I shall begin to cry."

Mary came up to her and again squeezed her hands affectionately. "You must never cry in this house, my dear," she said. "It's the only form of dissipation that Mark won't allow."

* * * * *

It was exactly two and a half hours later when Colin, straightening himself with a grunt, turned triumphantly to the pessimistic Davis.

"I think we've fixed her this time," he observed, wiping his hands on his dungaree trousers. "It will be nice to be able to push along at a reasonable pace without feeling that something's going to give."

The other lifted up the front seat and thrust away the spanner which he had been holding in his hand.

"It didn't seem to make much difference," he replied, "not judgin' by the way you started off this afternoon. I was half expectin' you and that young lady to come back on a couple of stretchers."

"Oh, we got along all right," said Colin. "Miss Seymour enjoyed the drive very much indeed."

"Did she?" was the somewhat incredulous answer. "Well, I reckon if she knew the state that steering gear was in she must be hard up for a bit of excitement."

Colin laughed, and, stripping off his overalls, stuffed them away into an open locker.

"You had better let me have the key," he said. "I don't suppose I shall be back till about eleven. I have promised to go down to Shadwell for supper,

only I must slip round to the hospital and tidy myself up first."

Davis handed over the desired article, and a few minutes afterwards, leaving his car in the gutter, Colin hurried up the steps of St. Christopher's, and passed in through the swing doors.

On catching sight of him the porter stepped out from his box.

"Telegram for you, sir," he announced. "Come in about a quarter of an hour ago."

Colin paused beneath the big centre light, and, ripping open the envelope, pulled out its contents.

The message was short but very much to the point :

*Please call at the Red Lodge to-morrow three-thirty.*—CARTER.

## CHAPTER III

In the days when a young and promising draper, called Mr. John Barker, had recently opened a small shop in the High Street, Kensington, Campden Hill was a singularly attractive place to live in. The favourite resort of affluent artists, retired judges, and other persons of culture and dignity, it still managed to retain a semi-rural tranquillity unknown to any other part of central London.

Time, however, which has dealt nobly with Mr. Barker, has unfortunately robbed the district of most of its former charm. Of the old-fashioned houses which stood formerly in their own pleasant grounds only a sadly thinned remnant now survive. Tucked away in odd corners, amid an ever encroaching flood of "desirable modern residences," they seem to wait sadly for the hour when, in a cloud of dust and mortar, the relentless tapping of the pick serves for their funeral bell.

The Red Lodge, the home of Professor Carter, dated back to the leisured days of George the Third. It was a square, creeper-clad house, surrounded by a high wall, with a covered passage-way leading up from the street to the front door. Through the outside gate, the upper half of which consisted of an iron grille, the curiously minded passer-by could, by

straining his neck, just obtain a glimpse into the neglected garden. Whether it were worth his while to indulge in such contortions, however, was a matter of some doubt, for a desolate expanse of ill-kept lawn, dotted here and there with stunted bushes and overhung by gaunt trees, was the only prospect that rewarded his enterprise.

Standing on the pavement, Colin inspected what was probably his future residence with a considerable amount of curiosity. He was not in the least fanciful, but even to a thoroughly healthy imagination the old house certainly presented a forlorn and rather mysterious aspect. There seemed to him nothing surprising in the fact that, having once been burgled, the Professor had begun to feel the need of a trustworthy assistant, especially if he were engaged in researches which would undoubtedly possess a large financial value.

On the right of the gate a rusty bell-handle lolled out dejectedly from its socket. Colin gave it a vigorous pull, and a distant jingling somewhere inside the house told him that the wire was still in working order.

Looking through the grille, he waited patiently for the best part of a minute. At last he heard the sound of somebody fumbling with a chain, then the front door opened, and an old, bent woman came slowly down the steps.

Holding her shawl together with one hand, she shuffled along to the end of the passage and peered at him through the ironwork.

" Are you the gentleman that's expected ? " she asked suspiciously.

" It's quite likely," said Colin. " Anyhow, I had a telegram from Professor Carter asking me to call at three-thirty."

" That must be right, then," was the somewhat grudging answer, and, turning the lock, she pulled back the gate just wide enough for him to enter.

Following her up the passage-way and through the front door, Colin found himself in a big, well-lighted hall, at the back of which a couple of french windows opened out into the garden behind. Several pieces of massive Victorian furniture were ranged symmetrically round the walls, and a broad, thickly carpeted staircase led up to the landing above.

" If you'll step into the library," observed his guide, " I'll tell Mr. Carter you've come."

She opened a door on the right, and, accepting her invitation, Colin passed through into a long, cheerless apartment, three sides of which were almost completely lined with books. There was no fire in the grate, and such chairs as there were looked so extremely uncomfortable that only the most hardened man of letters could have described it as an agreeable resort.

Colin did not attempt to sit down. After a cursory glance round he walked over to the nearest bookcase and began to examine the titles of some of the volumes, all of which appeared to deal with

scientific subjects, a fair proportion of them being in French and German. He was deep in this occupation when he heard the door open, and, wheeling round quickly, he found the Professor coming towards him.

Like every other young investigator, Colin was more or less familiar with photographs of his host, but all the same the latter's appearance in real life came to him with something of a shock. A very old man, wearing a skull cap, from which long white hair hung down over his collar, he seemed at first sight to be almost pitifully frail and feeble. It was only when a second glance revealed the gleam which still lurked behind his gold spectacles and the dour, obstinate lines of his mouth and chin that this sense of physical weakness was swept away by a sudden impression of extraordinary intellectual power and immense force of character.

With a little exclamation of annoyance he advanced to where Colin was standing.

"I am sorry that you should have been left alone in this ice-house," he began in a high, quavering voice. "I can't imagine why Mrs. Ramsay showed you in here, except that she happens to be a born fool."

Colin accepted the thin, veined hand which the old scientist offered him.

"I have been quite happy, thank you, sir," he said. "I have been inspecting your library."

"I trust that you found something to entertain

you," was the answer. "There are some interesting books here, but, unfortunately, they are mixed up with a good deal of trash. Every ignoramus who airs his views on some subject about which he knows nothing seems to think it necessary to send me a copy." He turned towards the entrance. "You had better come into my study," he added. "There is a nice fire there, and we can talk in comfort."

Leading the way to the door, he conducted Colin across the hall into another and almost similarly shaped room exactly opposite. Here also the walls were lined with bookcases, but, thanks to the fire and one or two easy chairs, there was a certain air of homeliness which had been altogether lacking in the library.

The Professor made a gesture towards a dilapidated couch.

"Sit down, Mr. Gray," he continued. "I don't know whether you appreciate a good cigar, but if you do I can offer you something a little out of the ordinary. Of course, if you are sufficiently young and barbarous to prefer a pipe don't hesitate to say so."

"Well, I'm not an expert," admitted Colin. "All the same, I like to improve my education when I get the chance."

The old man smiled grimly, and, moving across to a black oak bureau in the corner, returned with a box of long, delicately shaped Havanas.

"Smoking is the one pleasure left which I can still enjoy," he explained. "Under the circumstances, I take particular care to have the best."

He waited until Colin had lighted up, and then, following his example, placed the box on the table between them and seated himself in a big arm-chair in front of the fire.

"And now, my young friend," he said, "let us get to business. I believe that Onslow has said something to you about my reasons for asking you to come and see me."

Colin nodded. "Sir George called at the hospital yesterday," he said. "I understood from him that you were thinking of engaging a resident assistant, and that he had suggested me as a possible choice."

The Professor drew down the corners of his mouth in a dry smile.

"Oh, you understood that, did you?" he remarked. "Well, it's hardly the impression which Onslow conveyed to me. From the enthusiastic fashion in which he spoke about your abilities I gathered that I should be remarkably fortunate if you would even consider the proposal."

Colin flushed handsomely. "Sir George has always been uncommonly kind to me," he said, "but he knows that I should regard it as a tremendous honour to be allowed to work under you."

The Professor looked at him over the top of his spectacles.

"Well, I am glad to hear you speak so sensibly. Most clever young men are intolerably conceited." He paused. "I think I ought to make the situation

quite plain before we go any further. As Onslow may have mentioned, this suggested arrangement of mine isn't quite the compliment to your professional skill which it appears to be on the surface."

Colin laughed. "Yes, I know about that, sir," he replied. "I can only say that if you will allow me to assist you in the daytime I don't care how many burglars I have to tackle at night."

"It's hardly likely to be a regular feature of your duties," returned the Professor. "Still, the fact remains that this house has been broken into once, and there seems to be no apparent reason why the same thing shouldn't happen again."

"Did you lose much?" asked Colin.

The old man shook his head. "Nothing that I am aware of. My visitor, whoever he was, got into this room by the window. The only thing damaged was that desk in the corner." He nodded toward the black oak bureau. "The safe over there in which I generally keep a certain amount of money, was absolutely untouched."

"He might have been interrupted in the middle of his job," suggested Colin.

"He might have been," assented the Professor, "but as it happens he wasn't. It was not until Mrs. Ramsay came in here the next morning that we had the least idea anything was wrong."

Colin leaned forward and knocked off his ash into the fire-place. "It seems rather an extraordinary thing," he remarked. "Had you any specially

valuable papers—I mean, anything like a description of some new scientific process—which people might want to get hold of ? "

" I dare say I had," was the answer, " but if so it was certainly not in that desk. I keep everything relating to my work in a special cabinet in the laboratory. You would think that a gentleman who was sufficiently intelligent to try and steal things of that nature would at least assure himself first that he was on the right ground."

" What had the police got to say about it ? " Colin inquired. " I suppose you called them in ? "

" I did nothing of the sort," returned the Professor abruptly. " I have only a very limited amount of time remaining to me, and there are plenty of excellent ways in which I can occupy it. Because some lunatic chooses to break open my desk and rummage through my papers I fail to see why I should waste several valuable hours standing in a witness box answering superfluous and probably impertinent questions. All the same, these sort of experiences are extremely upsetting to a man of my age. They alarm the household, and they distract me from my work. In case of a similar experience, I should be glad to feel that there was someone on the premises who could be trusted to act with promptness and efficiency."

" You can depend on me for that," said Colin, " as long as I'm not asleep."

There was a brief pause, while the Professor took

off his spectacles and polished them with a red silk handkerchief.

"Well, now that we understand each other," he continued, "I think it would be as well to discuss one or two practical details. With regard to your remuneration, for instance. I don't know what you are getting at St. Christopher's, but I propose to give you four hundred a year. You will have no expenses, living in the house, so unless you are foolishly extravagant that ought to be quite an adequate salary."

"It will do me very nicely," said Colin. "As a matter of fact, I've got a little money of my own, and the only extravagant habit I've developed so far is keeping a car."

The Professor grunted. "When I was your age," he remarked, "young men either walked or rode. Still, as long as you are capable of amusing yourself it doesn't matter to me how you spend your leisure time." He replaced his spectacles and returned the handkerchief to his breast pocket. "I shall give instructions that you are to be properly looked after, but whether they will be carried out is another matter. Since my man Kennedy left me I have had no one in the house except Mrs. Ramsay and the cook. They are both old, like myself, and my own wants are so simple that their ideas of catering are probably a little on the Spartan side. If you find you are uncomfortable, or that you are not getting enough to eat and drink, you must let

me know." He paused. "As for recreation or entertainment—well, if you are expecting anything of that nature you are coming to the wrong place. The only visitor I ever have is my solicitor, Mr. Medwin, whom, by the way, I am expecting this afternoon. I warn you frankly that unless you can throw yourself into your work you will find life here intolerably dull."

Colin shook his head. "I don't think we need discuss that, sir," he said cheerfully. "Anyway, as far as my present feelings are concerned I wouldn't change places with anyone in England."

With another and rather more approving grunt the Professor hoisted himself slowly out of his chair.

"You seem to have some sense, my young friend," he observed. "How would you like to come along and look at the laboratory? I don't suppose Medwin will be here for another twenty minutes."

"I should like it very much," said Colin promptly.

He rose to his feet, and, dropping the stump of his cigar into the fire, followed his host out of the room and along the hall. On reaching the french windows the Professor turned to the left, and, having descended a couple of steps, pulled up in front of a solid-looking door, which he proceeded to unlock with a Yale key.

"This, of course, is not part of the original house," he explained. "I had it built on about

twenty years ago, and one way and another it's cost me a pretty penny, I can tell you."

He led the way inside, and, with an air of pride that he made no effort to conceal, turned on the electric light.

For a private laboratory the place was certainly unique. A large, lofty room, roofed with glass and lined with white tiles, it appeared to have been fitted up with a complete disregard for expense that would have excited envy in the most lavishly endowed American University.

For several seconds Colin stood looking round in voiceless appreciation. His eyes wandered in turn over the shining array of taps and switches, the enamelled basins, the big electric furnace, and all the other up-to-date appliances which gleamed invitingly under the hard, unshaded light.

At last, with a sigh of satisfaction, he turned to the Professor.

"As long as I can work here," he said, "I don't care what I have to eat or drink."

Evidently pleased with his companion's enthusiasm, the old man closed the door carefully behind them, and, having replaced the key in his pocket, started off on an explanatory tour of the room. With the absorption of an expert loosed upon his favourite topic, he moved methodically along from one spot to another, stopping in front of each object in turn to explain or demonstrate its various uses.

Colin, who was more than content to play the part of a listener, followed him round in absolute silence. Familiar as he was with all the latest developments in research, his acquaintance with many branches was naturally of a rather superficial nature, and, although he was prepared for something of the sort, the apparent depth and accuracy of the Professor's knowledge filled him with amazed respect.

To what height this feeling might have attained it is impossible to say, for just as they had arrived at the electrical furnace a sudden tap on the door interrupted their proceedings.

With an impatient click of his tongue the aged scientist glanced sharply round in the direction of the sound.

"Now who the devil's that?" he exclaimed. "I have given orders repeatedly that when I'm in here I am not to be disturbed."

He shuffled wrathfully down the room, and, jerking open the door, revealed the lean figure of Mrs. Ramsay.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "Why don't you obey my instructions?"

"It's no good getting cross," returned the housekeeper impassively. "You asked Mr. Medwin to call, and you can't leave 'im sitting in the study."

"Oh, he's come, has he?" was the slightly mollified answer. "Well, in that case I suppose we had better go along and make ourselves civil to

him." He turned to Colin, who had followed him to the door. "You will stay to tea, of course?" he added.

Colin, who was trying hard not to smile, expressed his willingness, and, having closed and locked the laboratory, the Professor conducted him back through the hall to the room which they had recently quitted.

A big, clean-shaven, middle-aged man, who was standing in front of the fire, stepped forward at their entrance.

"I hope I am not too punctual," he began, in a curiously smooth voice. "I think four o'clock was the time you mentioned in your letter."

He shook hands with his host, and at the same time his glance travelled inquisitively towards Colin.

"That's quite correct," replied the Professor. "I was just showing the laboratory to my young friend here. By the way, let me introduce you. Dr. Gray—Mr. Medwin."

Colin felt his hand enveloped in a large, soft palm, while a pair of very acute eyes rapidly scanned his face.

"I am delighted to meet you," said Mr. Medwin.

"It's a pleasure that you will probably have on future occasions," observed the Professor. "Dr. Gray is coming to live here as my resident assistant."

It seemed to Colin that in spite of his bland manner the lawyer was momentarily disconcerted.

" Really," he observed, after a slight hesitation, " I had no idea that you were contemplating anything of that sort."

" I don't suppose you had," said the Professor dryly. " The idea only occurred to me last week, but when I make up my mind I generally act upon it at once. If you will forgive my saying so, Medwin, it's a habit that some members of your profession might cultivate with advantage."

Mr. Medwin, who appeared to have recovered his self-possession, smiled affably.

" I won't dispute the statement," he said. " There's no doubt that, taking us altogether, we're a dilatory lot."

The arrival of Mrs. Ramsay with the tea made a temporary diversion, and, having requested Colin to officiate, the Professor seated himself on the couch alongside his visitor.

" What I chiefly wanted to see you about," he began, " was that new agreement with the American Dye Company. I had a letter from them yesterday, and, with their usual transatlantic hustle, they are anxious to get the matter settled up at once."

" Well, there's no reason why it shouldn't be," returned the other. " I went through the papers last night, and they all seem to be in order. If I had known you were in a hurry I would have brought them along." He paused. " Perhaps Dr. Gray would be good enough to stroll back with me as far as my house after tea. In that case I can hand

them over to him. I would fetch them myself, but, unfortunately, I have an engagement."

"I can manage that all right," said Colin. "I shan't be wanted at the hospital until seven."

He finished pouring out the tea, and, having distributed the cups, took the vacant seat on the farther side of the fire-place.

Somehow or other the personality of the big, suave solicitor had already inspired him with a vague distrust. He always disliked men with soft hands and that particular type of voice, especially when, as in the present case, their eyes were unpleasantly close together.

He had, too, an instinctive feeling that, in spite of his apparent friendliness, Mr. Medwin was by no means disposed to regard him as a desirable addition to the Red Lodge. Whether it was a mere whim or whether Mr. Medwin resented the prospect of anybody else being mixed up with the Professor's business affairs, it was impossible to guess. The only thing Colin felt sure about was that the announcement of his engagement had come to the other as a distinctly unwelcome surprise.

After chatting away amiably for about twenty minutes, Mr. Medwin at length rose to his feet and announced that it was time for him to be taking his departure.

"I live quite close by, in Albert Terrace," he added, turning to Colin, "so if you are in no special hurry it's hardly worth while bothering about a

taxi. You can walk there and back in a quarter of an hour."

" And I shall be extremely obliged to you for your trouble, Gray," interposed the Professor. " It will be a great convenience to me to have the papers to-night. I am really beginning to wonder how I have managed to get along all this time without you."

Colin laughed, and, picking up his hat from the side table where he had originally placed it, followed the still smiling Mr. Medwin out into the hall and along the covered passage-way.

They exchanged no remark until the iron gate had closed behind them, when, turning down the hill, his new acquaintance addressed him with an air of good-natured amusement.

" A queer character, our old friend," he observed. " I always say he might have stepped bodily out of one of Dickens's books." He paused, and eyed Colin again with that sharp, penetrating glance of his. " Have you known him long ? " he added.

" Not very," said Colin. " About an hour, to be exact."

Mr. Medwin raised his eyebrows.

" Really ! " he exclaimed. " Then I suppose your arrangement to come and live at the Red Lodge was only decided this afternoon ? "

Colin nodded.

" I wonder what put the idea into his head," continued the lawyer. " It's almost the last thing

one would have expected from such a confirmed old hermit."

For a moment Colin hesitated. The question was natural enough, but since the Professor had chosen to remain silent he thought it better to keep his own counsel.

"There is a lot of hard work in connection with research," he replied. "When a man gets to his age he's bound to require a certain amount of help."

"Yes, yes, that's true, of course," assented the other. "As a matter of fact, I have suggested to him several times myself that he was overtaxing his strength. The only thing that surprises me is his proposal that you should live in the house." He paused. "If you won't think me inquisitive, may I ask how you came to make his acquaintance?"

"There was nothing very remarkable about it," said Colin. "I happen to be house surgeon at St. Christopher's, and Sir George Onslow, one of the visiting physicians, was good enough to mention my name to him."

"I have often heard of St. Christopher's," returned Mr. Medwin pleasantly. "A client of mine, Lord Cleveland, was vice-chairman for several years. You'll find your new existence rather dull, won't you, after the life and bustle of a big hospital?"

"I don't expect to," said Colin. "I am extremely interested in research work, and from what I have seen of the Professor I think we shall get along together very nicely."

As he spoke they came out into the High Street, and, not knowing which way to turn, he glanced inquiringly at his companion.

"Straight across the road," said Mr. Medwin. "It's only just round the corner out of Kensington Square."

They made their way through the traffic, and a few minutes' walk brought them to a row of small white, semi-detached houses, each one standing back behind a narrow strip of garden.

Mr. Medwin pulled up in front of the third, and opened the gate for Colin.

"This is my château," he announced. "Not quite so magnificent as the Red Lodge, but it does well enough for a middle-aged bachelor."

He proceeded up the path, and, unlocking the front door, ushered Colin into a tiny hall, the walls of which were hung round with valuable sporting prints.

"I prefer a small house to a flat," he continued, "and I am lucky enough to have a French man-servant and his wife, who run the entire place for me."

He opened a door to the left and, switching on the electric light, revealed a charmingly furnished dining-room.

"Perhaps you won't mind waiting in here for a moment," he added. "You will find some whisky and soda and a box of cigarettes on the sideboard. Make yourself at home while I go and fetch the papers."

With another genial smile he disappeared into the opposite apartment, and, accepting his invitation, Colin strolled across the room and helped himself to a cigarette.

It was quite evident that, although he was contented with a small house, Mr. Medwin was a gentleman of taste and means. The fine Persian carpet, the harmoniously coloured curtains, and the admirably preserved Chippendale chairs could only have been the choice of a man who was blessed with an ample income and a cultivated feeling for beautiful surroundings.

Having surveyed everything with leisurely appreciation, Colin mixed himself a drink and sauntered back to the fire-place. He had taken a sip, and was reaching to deposit his glass upon the mantelpiece, when a small photograph in a silver frame suddenly attracted his attention. He paused midway and stared at it with interest. It was a snapshot of a man upon horseback—a rough amateur effort apparently taken just before the start of a steeplechase.

The rider's face was turned full towards him, and, slightly out of focus as the negative was, the features seemed curiously familiar. He lifted it down and examined it more closely. The impression that it was a picture of someone whom he had met became stronger than ever, but although he racked his memory he could get no nearer towards placing the original.

He was still puzzling over the problem when he heard footsteps crossing the hall. Replacing the frame in its former position, he faced round towards the door, and the next moment Mr. Medwin entered carrying a large envelope in his hand.

"There are the papers," he said, handing them to Colin. "I am sorry to have kept you waiting." His eye fell upon the glass, and with an approving nod he turned away in the direction of the side-board. "I think I shall have to follow your example," he added, "if it's merely to drink success to your new venture."

He splashed some spirit into a tumbler and filled it up with water.

"My best wishes!" he said heartily, "and I hope that the experiment will prove a complete success."

"I hope so too," returned Colin. "It certainly looks promising enough as far as it's gone at present."

The lawyer emptied his glass and replaced it beside the tantalus.

"I shall be very interested to hear how you get on," he continued. "The Professor is a wonderful old gentleman, but of course he's inclined to be a trifle eccentric. With a little tact, however, I think you ought to manage him excellently. As soon as you have settled down you must come round to dinner one night and tell me all about it.

Colin made some conventional reply to the effect

that he would be delighted, though, as a matter of strict accuracy, the prospect of his confiding in Mr. Medwin seemed to him to be a particularly remote one.

However, he shook hands cordially enough, and, escorted by his host as far as the garden gate, started off briskly down the terrace on his return journey.

He had reached the corner and was just turning into Kensington Square when his thoughts suddenly went back to the photograph which he had been examining in the dining-room.

At the same moment a flash of memory darted through his mind, and he pulled up short with a half-stifled exclamation.

He knew now !

It was a portrait of Major Fenton, the man to whom Nancy had introduced him outside her studio.

## CHAPTER IV

COLIN finished his coffee and looked inquiringly across the table.

" Have you any special plans for this afternoon ? " he asked. " If not, I thought I'd get on with that new parcel of stuff from Paris. The sooner it's sorted out and classified the better."

The Professor, who was engaged in selecting a cigar, stopped in the middle of the operation.

" Let me see, Gray," he observed, " how long have you been with me ? "

Colin reflected for a moment. " I came on a Wednesday," he said. " That will be three weeks to-morrow."

" And I believe," continued the Professor, " that except for a few occasional pauses for sleep and refreshment, you have spent the whole of that period shut up in the laboratory."

Colin gave a protesting laugh. " Well, I wanted to get the hang of things as soon as possible," he replied. " I can stand a lot of work provided it's interesting."

" That appears to be the truth," admitted his employer. " All the same, every picee of machinery has its breaking-point, and, as I am beginning to find you extremely useful, I have no wish that you

should suddenly collapse. You will therefore oblige me by going out into the open air and not showing your face inside this house again until bedtime."

"Just as you please, sir," said Colin, pushing back his chair. "I suppose it would be no use my suggesting that you should try a little of the same prescription yourself?"

The Professor shook his head. "I am more favourably situated than you, my young friend," he replied. "In the course of nature I shall soon have all the rest that I need." He chuckled at his own sombre jest, and, coming forward, laid his hand on Colin's shoulder. "You have been of very real assistance to me, Gray," he added, "but there is no sense in flogging a willing horse. I can quite well spare you to-day, so off you go, whether you like it or not."

Colin, who had been long enough at the Red Lodge to know the futility of arguing, at once rose to his feet.

"I will see if I can rout out Mark Ashton," he said, "that doctor pal of mine I was telling you about the other day. I should think that with any luck we ought to be able to carry on until midnight."

He accepted a cigar which the Professor offered him, and, making his way to the telephone in the hall, rang up the Shadwell surgery.

"Hallo!" came a voice. "Who's that? Colin?

Why, good Lord, man, we thought you were dead ! "

" Why should I be dead ? " retorted Colin. " I'm not one of your patients."

He heard a laugh at the other end of the wire.

" As a matter of fact," he continued, " I'm just starting off to pay you a visit."

" Splendid ! " was the answer. " Mary's still away up North, but you'll find me here, and Miss Seymour too. What more could you want ? "

" Nothing," assented Colin, " I was going to suggest that if you can get away this evening I should take you both out to a theatre."

" No chance of that," replied Mark regretfully. " At least, not so far as I'm concerned. I might spare Miss Seymour if you'll do something for me on your way here."

" What is it ? "

" I left an umbrella in a taxi last night, a very superior umbrella, with 'Mark Ashton' engraved on the handle. If you're driving down you might look in at the Lost Property Office and see whether it's turned up."

" Right you are," said Colin. " I shall be along in about an hour."

He hung up the receiver, and, putting away the Professor's cigar in an inside pocket, donned his hat and coat and proceeded to leave the house.

A little way down the hill, in a side mews off Vicarage Gardens, he had discovered a new garage,

to which he had recently transferred his patronage. The car was ready for him, and a few minutes later he was seated at the driving wheel, skilfully threading his way through the crowded traffic that renders High Street, Kensington, such a stimulating thoroughfare.

Big Ben was in the act of striking three as he arrived at Westminster Bridge. He pulled up outside the entrance to the Lost Property Office, and, pushing open the swing door, advanced to the counter, where a stalwart constable was thoughtfully scratching his head with the stump of a pencil.

Having listened in silence to Colin's inquiry, the man got down from his seat and disappeared into the back regions, returning almost immediately with the umbrella in his hand.

"You'll have to sign your name here," he announced, pushing forward an official-looking paper. "And there'll be two and sixpence reward for the driver."

Without entering upon any superfluous explanations, Colin paid over the desired sum, and, after neatly forging Mark's signature, made his way back to the car. He was leaning over the side door, storing away his trophy, when a gruff voice suddenly addressed him from the pavement behind.

"Dr. Gray, unless I'm much mistaken!"

Turning round promptly, he found himself face to face with the burly, shrewd-eyed figure of Inspector Marsden.

"I thought I was right," continued the detective. "It's part of my business to recognise people by their back view."

Colin gripped the large and efficient-looking hand which the speaker extended to him.

"I'm awfully glad to see you again," he said heartily. "I hope you're none the worse for that little dust-up in the King's Road?"

"Still a bit sore in the ribs," was the answer. "I fancy the beauty who got that kick in must have been a footballer at some time or other in his career. I'll give him football if I ever find out which of 'em it was."

"How about our ginger-haired friend?" inquired Colin. "I've been expecting to hear every day that I was wanted as a witness."

"You'll be wanted all right," replied the Inspector. "He's under remand at present, and I don't suppose the case will come on for another month. There are several pretty black marks against Master Dick, and we hope to collect enough evidence to put him out of business for some considerable period." He paused. "By the way," he added, "if you've a few minutes to spare, come along up to our place and let me introduce you to one or two of the boys. I told them what you did for us the other day, and they'd be glad of the chance of shaking hands with you."

Knowing that Mark was unlikely to be free until four o'clock, Colin decided that he might as well

accept the invitation. He had never been inside Scotland Yard, and the prospect rather appealed to him.

"What shall I do with the car?" he asked. "Leave it here?"

"Better bring it into the yard," said the Inspector. "No one will try to pinch it then—not unless he's a bit of an optimist."

Getting into his seat, Colin started forward alongside his companion, and turned in through the big iron gates which guard the head-quarters of the London Police Force.

There were several other cars standing against the wall, and, leaving his own in company with them, he followed the Inspector through a low doorway and up a long flight of stone stairs.

They emerged into a broad corridor with doors on either side.

"Here we are!" announced his guide, halting in front of the second. "I don't know who's on duty to-day, but we're sure to find somebody about."

He led the way into a large, business-like apartment, the principal furniture of which consisted of a couple of roll-top desks. At one of them was seated an alert-looking man in a well-cut blue suit, who glanced up sharply at their entrance.

"Hallo, Pat!" said the Inspector. "I've got someone here I want to introduce you to. This is Dr. Gray of St. Christopher's Hospital."

The other laid down his pen, and, rising from his chair, shook Colin's hand.

"You're welcome, sir," he said, with a distinctly Irish accent. "We have heard all about you from our friend Marsden. My name is O'Brien—Inspector Patrick O'Brien. I am pleased to have the privilege of making your acquaintance."

"It's very nice of you to put it like that," said Colin. "I don't think I deserve any particular compliments, though. I only did what anyone else would have done who had happened to be on the spot."

Both men smiled.

"That may be your impression," was the answer, "but you can take it from me that you're a trifle off the mark. Watching a police officer kicked to death is one of the public's favourite entertainments."

"O'Brien comes from Dublin, you see," put in Marsden, "so you must make allowances for a touch of bitterness." He pulled forward a chair, and, thrusting his hand into his pocket, produced a large rubber pouch. "Make yourself comfortable and try a pipe of this tobacco, doctor," he added. "It was given to me by a ship's captain, and they don't generally go far wrong—not from what I've seen of them."

Colin took the proffered seat, and, drawing out his briar, proceeded to fill it carefully with the fragrant brown flakes.

"I'm rather interested in 'Ginger Dick,'" he

remarked. "One would hardly take him for a Napoleon of crime, judging by his appearance."

"No, his looks aren't anything to shout about," agreed Marsden. "All the same, he's a dangerous little devil if ever there was one. As I told you the other day, he's in with all the lowest scum of the Turf, and, thanks to him and his crowd, there are several of our boys on the retired list, and likely to remain there."

"It never occurred to me before," said Colin, "but I suppose there are healthier occupations than being a detective on a racecourse."

"You can back on that," was O'Brien's rejoinder. "I've had some of it myself, and, though I'm partial to what you may call an active life, I wasn't exactly sorry when they shifted me to another department."

"Tell him some of your experiences, Pat," suggested Inspector Marsden. "It's no use having a distinguished guest if you don't try to entertain him."

The Irishman, who apparently only needed this encouragement, plunged at once into a series of reminiscences, all dealing with that dark underworld of ruffianism which lurks furtively beneath the brilliant surface of racing. He told his stories well, and Colin, who knew little or nothing about the Turf, listened to him with absorbed interest. It was not, indeed, until the hands of the office clock were pointing to the half-hour that he reluctantly knocked out his pipe into the fire-place and rose from his chair.

"I hate to break up this cheerful party," he said truthfully, "but I've promised to be down in Shadwell by four, and I've got an unpleasant sort of feeling that I must be keeping you both from your work."

"Oh, you needn't worry about that," replied Marsden, smiling. "I'm fixed here until midnight anyway, and, no matter how busy Pat is, he can always find time to talk."

"I want to hear some more of his reminiscences," said Colin, "and yours too. Perhaps if you could both get away together the same evening you would come out and feed with me? We could go to the 'Cheshire Cheese' or somewhere like that. I can't ask you to my place, because at present I'm acting as bottle-washer to Professor Carter."

"The 'Cheshire Cheese' sounds all right to me," said O'Brien approvingly. "You give us a ring when you've got a spare night, and we'll try and fix it up."

"Things are getting altogether too one-sided," objected Marsden. "Can't you think of a little service we could do for you, doctor, just by way of a change?"

Colin was on the point of making some laughing disclaimer, when an idea suddenly occurred to him.

"Would it be a lot of trouble to get me some information about a man I was introduced to the other day?" he asked.

"Not a bit," replied Marsden. "What's his name?"

"Fenton," said Colin. "Major Fenton. He's a chap of about forty-five, tall, clean-shaven, with rather a red face. All I know about him is that he has been a long time abroad, and that at present he is living in London and drives a Daimler car. It's only a matter of personal curiosity, but if you could find out who he is and what sort of reputation he has I should be uncommonly grateful."

Marsden jotted down the particulars and folded up the paper.

"That ought to be simple enough," he replied. "I'll hand this over to Ainsworth, who's in charge of all that kind of thing, and if you look us up in about a week we shall probably be able to give you the gentleman's life-history."

Colin expressed his thanks, and, having shaken hands with each of them in turn, made his way back down the staircase and out into the main courtyard.

Resuming his journey eastwards, he followed the Embankment as far as Blackfriars Bridge, where he struck off through a maze of side streets, which eventually brought him out close to the grimy and retired tavern presided over by Mr. Higgins.

The yard door was open, and a glance inside revealed the burly outline of the proprietor himself, engaged in the domestic task of washing his bull-terrier. On hearing the car he paused in his operations and signalled to Colin to enter.

"Bring 'er along in, mister," he called out. "Bring 'er along in, an' look out for that bucket."

Carrying out these instructions successfully, Colin jerked forward over the cobblestones until he came to a halt alongside the seated figure.

" Pleased to see yer," continued Mr. Higgins, in a hospitable tone. " Quite a time since you was 'ere last, ain't it ? "

" It's getting on for a month," admitted Colin, as he clambered out of the car. " In fact I've not been since the night I brought Miss Seymour."

At the mention of Nancy's name the landlord's mottled face wreathed itself into a smile.

" Didn't know then that you was goin' to leave 'er be'ind yer," he observed jocularly. " Thought you'd give us a kind of pleasant surprise, eh, guv'nor ? "

" That was the idea," replied Colin. " I was just going to ask you if you'd seen anything of her."

" I done more than that," was the proud rejoinder ; " I've 'ad a talk with 'er, I 'ave. I 'appened to be outside when she come by last Thursday, an' she stopped and chatted away as friendly as kiss me 'and. Ah, she's one o' the right sort, she is ; no frills nor nonsense about 'er."

" I suppose she'll be quite safe going about alone ? " said Colin. " People know she's working for the doctor ? "

" Lor' love yer, yus," ejaculated Mr. Higgins. " No one wouldn't interfere with 'er, not round 'ere. This ain't the West End. We knows 'ow to be'ave ourselves in Shadwell."

" I'm just going along to the surgery now," said Colin. " I'll tell her some of the nice things you've been saying about her."

" You do," was the answer. " An' you can add, with my best respecks, mister, that if ever she'd honour this 'ouse by droppin' in and takin' a cup o' tea, there'd be no prouder man than Bill 'Iggins, not in the 'ole of London."

Five minutes later, with a pleasant tingle of anticipation in his heart, Colin mounted the steps of Mark's residence and jerked briskly at the bell. The door was opened by Martha Jane, the fat, grubby-faced little maid-of-all-work, who welcomed him with the grin of an old acquaintance.

" You'll find 'em hupstairs in the study," she announced, in answer to his inquiry. " I know hey're expectin' you, 'cos the doctor told me not to ing tea till you came."

" Well, here I am," said Colin. " Is there anyhing good to eat ? "

" I'm makin' scones," replied Martha Jane. " Some o' them yeller ones, wot you gen'rally seems to fancy."

Colin stepped inside, and deposited Mark's umbrella in the hat-stand.

" You push off and continue the good work," he remarked. " I'll find my own way up."

Still grinning, Martha Jane closed the front door and shuffled along the passage towards the kitchen. Just as she disappeared there was a sound on the

landing above, and Mark's spectacled face protruded itself over the banisters.

"You've been a devil of a time coming," he observed. "We were beginning to think you must have had a breakdown."

"I like that!" retorted Colin, struggling out of his overcoat. "Here have I been chasing all round London after your infernal umbrella——"

"Oh, you've got it, have you?" interrupted Mark. "That's topping. You don't know how deeply indebted I am to you."

"Yes, I do," said Colin. "Exactly half a dollar —what I had to give the cabman as a reward for his honesty."

Nancy's face appeared suddenly beside that of her employer, and smiled down at him in friendly welcome.

"Please don't start quarrelling about money," she said pathetically. "I'm simply dying for a cup of tea."

There seemed to be something strangely familiar and attractive to Colin in the mere sound of her voice, and, running lightly up the staircase, he pressed both their hands in a simultaneous greeting.

"I'm so sorry," he exclaimed. "I was forgetting the brutal way in which Mark always treats his staff. I suppose he has been working you to death and half starving you at the same time."

"Of course I have," declared Mark. "Look at her worn and haggard appearance."

"Well, we haven't been exactly idle," admitted Nancy, laughing. "All the same, I think I am bearing up pretty well."

Mark led the way into the study, where a table was already laid, and waved his hand towards the largest of the arm-chairs.

"You take the seat of honour, Colin," he said. "It's a privilege we always keep for distinguished strangers."

"There's no need to rub it in," objected Colin. "I should have looked you up ages ago if it hadn't been for my devotion to duty. This is the first holiday I've had since I went to the Professor's."

"How are you getting on?" asked Nancy.

"Up to the present," replied Colin modestly, "I think I have given what they call complete satisfaction."

"What's the old man like?" demanded Mark. "Easy to live with?"

Colin hesitated. "It all depends," he answered. "We've managed to hit it off well enough, but then I've rather gone out of my way to humour his little weaknesses. He's one of the sort that you've just got to take or leave. As long as you do exactly what he wants he's kindness itself. If anyone tried to oppose him or contradict him I should think he could be distinctly unpleasant."

"There must be a lot of people about like that," said Nancy. "At least, I seem to have run up against a good few."

"And how do you stand with regard to the job?" inquired Mark. "I suppose he doesn't let you into more secrets than he can possibly help?"

"Oh, yes, he does," replied Colin. "He lets me into everything. I've soaked up so much knowledge the last three weeks that I'm beginning to wonder whether there's anything left to learn."

Mark gazed at him with a certain amount of incredulity. "Do you mean to say that if he died to-morrow you would be in a position to carry on his work?"

"I'd have a damn' good shot at it, anyway," declared Colin. "Of course, I haven't a quarter of his ability, but he's discussed all his ideas with me, and explained them in such detail that if I couldn't make something or other out of them I should be next door to an idiot."

Mark turned to Nancy and nodded his head. "It's panning out just as I prophesied," he said sadly. "We shan't see much more of him at Shadwell. Before we can look round he'll be splashing about in a Rolls-Royce and——"

His prediction was cut short by the sudden appearance of Martha Jane, who lurched in through the doorway carrying a large tray and breathing somewhat heavily from her exertions.

"I vote that we adjourn the discussion of my future," suggested Colin, as they pulled up their chairs round the table. "It's your private affairs

that interest me, Mark. As the person responsible for the engagement I want to know whether you are pleased with your new assistant."

Nancy, who had seated herself in front of the tray, paused with the teapot in mid-air.

"This is very embarrassing," she observed. "Hadn't I better leave the room for a few moments?"

"You go on pouring out," said Mark firmly. "You can blush just as well here as in the passage." He helped himself to a scone and pushed the plate across the table towards Colin. "When you told us you'd found an angel, my lad," he continued, "you were speaking the literal truth. I had no idea that there was another such woman in the world apart from Mary."

"Don't listen to him," interrupted Nancy hastily. "The truth is that both he and Mrs. Ashton are so ridiculously good-natured that they hadn't the heart to turn me away."

"I know Mary's opinion already," said Colin. "I had a touching little letter from her just before she went North. She seems to regard me as a highly successful understudy of Providence."

"And, by Gad, it's true!" broke in Mark with enthusiasm. "I should have been absolutely in the soup without Miss Seymour. She's simply splendid, Colin. Down here at nine o'clock every morning, and working away like a galley-slave until seven or eight in the evening."

"Well, that's what I'm paid for," objected Nancy. "And, besides, I don't look on it as work. I so enjoy the feeling that I'm doing something useful, instead of sitting all day typing out a lot of stories that nobody wants to read."

"What do the patients think of the arrangement?" asked Colin. "I gathered from Mr. Higgins that it's one of the principal topics of local interest."

"It's been the best advertisement I ever had," replied Mark, with a chuckle. "I was a little doubtful at first, so I've told everybody that Miss Seymour and Mary are first cousins. We're rather strong on the conventions in Shadwell, and that put everything on a nice, respectable footing."

"I don't like tampering with the truth," said Colin. "All the same, it has its advantages at times." He glanced mischievously at Nancy. "In future, for instance," he added, "it will be obviously necessary that we should both address you by your Christian name."

Nancy laughed. "I never thought of that," she said. "It shows how unaccustomed I am to anything in the nature of deception."

"You'll soon improve," returned Colin hopefully. "It's wonderful what one can do after a month or two with the medical profession." He leaned forward and selected another scone from the rapidly dwindling pile. "Now what about that theatre idea of mine?" he continued. "Can't you possibly

manage it, Mark? I'll do the thing in a really generous way—stand you dinner and seats and drive you both home in the car afterwards."

Mark shook his head reluctantly. "I'd come like a shot if I could," he replied, "but I've about twenty prescriptions to make up and a dozen cases to attend to." He paused. "All the same," he added, "there's no earthly reason why you shouldn't take Miss Seymour."

"Oh, that's not fair," protested Nancy. "I can't go off and leave you to do all the work."

Mark folded his arms. "There's only one thing I demand from my staff," he observed sternly, "and that is complete and unquestioning obedience." He turned to Colin. "What you both want," he added, "is some fresh air and a little healthy amusement. Why not have a run out into the country first? It's a fine evening, and you can get back up West in plenty of time for the theatre."

"Now I call that a jolly bright notion!" exclaimed Colin. "What do you say, Cousin Nancy?"

"It sounds most tempting," agreed Nancy. "All the same, I think it would be horribly selfish. I am sure that if anyone needs an evening off it's the doctor. The last thing I promised Mrs. Ashton was not to allow him to overwork."

"I am the head of the family," insisted Mark, "and my orders are that you leave this house directly you've finished tea. Take her for a good

long spin to start with, Colin, give her a nice dinner, and then get seats for something really frivolous and cheerful. That's my prescription, and I depend on you to see that it's properly administered."

* * * * *

With her eyes shining, and her cheeks flushed by the wind, Nancy stepped out of the car on to the comparatively deserted pavement of Whitcomb Street.

"Oh!" she said with a faint sigh. "That was simply heavenly!"

Colin, who had jumped down first to open the door, looked at her with an approving twinkle.

"Not bad, was it?" he agreed. "We've only been an hour and a half and we must have done at least forty miles."

He glanced round in the direction of the Motor Club, outside which they had alighted, and at the same moment a broad-shouldered, seedy-looking gentleman in a dilapidated ulster suddenly appeared out of the darkness.

"Oh, there you are, Joe," he continued. "I want you to look after the car for me. We're dining and going to a theatre, so I don't suppose I shall be back until half-past eleven."

"That's all right, sir," replied Joe comfortingly. "You'll find me 'ere, no matter wot time you come."

"Now, where shall we make for?" inquired

Colin, turning to Nancy. " Unless you've any particular choice I suggest Romano's and the Vaudeville."

Nancy looked a little doubtful. " I'm thinking of my clothes," she explained. " I'm not fit to go anywhere really smart."

Colin studied her critically. " Don't you believe it," he said. " You could walk straight into Paradise without even tidying up."

He slipped half-a-crown into Joe's hand, and, taking Nancy firmly by the elbow, piloted her across the street in the direction of Leicester Square.

Ten minutes later, escorted by a sympathetic manager, they were making their way towards a small table in the balcony of the famous Strand restaurant.

" You order the dinner," said Nancy, as they took their seats. " I always enjoy things much more if somebody else chooses them."

She leaned forward in her chair, and looked down contentedly at the animated scene below, while Colin picked up the menu and studied it with becoming gravity.

" I think we'll have a little clear soup to start with," he began, " followed by sole *à la bonne femme*, a roast grouse, and iced meringues." He paused. " Do you prefer champagne or sparkling Moselle ? "

" I don't know," said Nancy frankly. " I've never tasted either of them."

"We'll have half a bottle of both then," said Colin. "You can try them and see which you like best, and I'll drink the other."

"By the way," he added, as the waiter hurried off with the order, "have you been seeing anything of that friend of yours, Major Fenton—the chap you introduced me to in Jubilee Place?"

For a moment Nancy remained silent.

"Why do you ask me that?" she inquired.

"Oh, I don't know," said Colin casually. "It just happened to come into my head."

She paused again. "He has been round at the studio two or three evenings," she said slowly. "As a matter of fact, he was there last night."

"I suppose he's heard all about your new job?"

She nodded. "Dr. Gray——" she began.

"Make it Colin," he interrupted. "I can't call you Nancy unless you back me up."

"Well, Colin, then——" She hesitated once more. "There's something I think I ought to tell you about Major Fenton, only—only it's horribly difficult for me to know how to put it."

"Wait until you've had some dinner," he suggested. "No one talks comfortably when they're half starving."

She shook her head. "No, now I've started I think I'd better go on and get it over. The first time I saw Major Fenton after we met him together he naturally asked me who you were. I told him

what I knew about you, and how we'd become acquainted, and, although he didn't say much, he seemed to think that I'd done wrong in asking you back to my studio. I suppose in a way he looks on himself as a sort of guardian of mine."

"Perhaps he does," said Colin gravely. "People who have lived a long time in hot climates often suffer from hallucinations!"

"That didn't matter," continued Nancy, "but last night when he came round he spoke about you again, and this time he said something that made me really angry—something that I'm perfectly sure isn't true."

Colin was leaning towards her, his grey eyes alight with interest.

"What was it?" he demanded briefly.

"He—well, he didn't put it quite definitely, but he hinted that you were not the sort of man to make a friend of; that you were leaving the hospital on account of some dreadful scandal about one of the nurses."

For a second Colin stared at her in blank amazement. Then he suddenly broke into a peal of laughter.

"Good heavens, Nancy!" he exclaimed. "If you'd only seen 'em!"

"I didn't believe it, of course," she went on hurriedly. "I was certain he must be making some stupid mistake."

Colin's lips tightened. "I object to people

making mistakes of that sort about me," he observed rather grimly.

Before Nancy could reply the waiter arrived with the soup, followed a moment later by another, who proceeded to uncork and pour out the wine.

"You mustn't take it too seriously," she continued, as soon as they were alone again. "It was a detestable thing of Major Fenton to say, but I don't think he meant any real harm by it. He explained that he'd heard the story from somebody at his club, and that he'd only repeated it to me because he felt that it was his duty. As I told you before, just because he once knew my father, he seems to have some ridiculous notion that he ought to look after me."

Colin, who had been sprinkling a little pepper into his soup, looked up with a smile.

"Well, don't let's waste our time discussing it any more," he said cheerfully. "It's just a silly lie, and, anyway, there are lots of much pleasanter things to talk about." He raised his glass. "I'm going to propose the health of our old pal 'Ginger Dick.' He may have his faults, but, after all, if it wasn't for him we shouldn't be sitting here now."

"That's true," agreed Nancy. "Here's to 'Ginger Dick.'" She took a long sip and then set down her glass. "If that's sparkling Moselle," she added thoughtfully, "I don't think I'll bother about tasting the champagne."

At about twenty minutes before midnight, faithful to his pledged word, the reliable Joe slouched forward out of the shadows and greeted them with a friendly salute.

"'Ere we are, guv'nor," he announced. "All ready an' waitin' for yer, as the grave-digger said."

He opened the door of the car for Nancy, and, making his way round to the front, succeeded after two or three abortive efforts in starting up the engine.

"She's a bit cold, like meself," he continued. "It's bin freezin' crool 'ard all the evenin', an' I reckon we both got a touch of it in our innards."

"You must follow it up with something hot," said Colin, handing him another half-crown. "Rum's the best as long as you don't put too much water into it."

"I ain't likely to," replied Joe, with a grin. "There's quite enough o' that done before we gets the stuff."

He pocketed the coin, and, closing the door after them, stepped back on to the pavement.

"Good night, sir, an' thank yer kindly. Good night, miss, an' Gawd bless yer both."

"I like Joe," said Nancy, as they slid out into the glare and tumult of Piccadilly Circus. "Is that his profession—standing there all night looking after cars?"

"That's his present profession," replied Colin, "but he's what you might call come down in the

world. Before he took to drink he used to be one of the best middle-weight boxers in England."

Nancy opened her blue eyes to their fullest extent.

"A prize-fighter?" she exclaimed.

Colin nodded. "Joe Bates of Wapping. One of the gamest men who ever stepped into a ring."

"What made him take to drink?" inquired Nancy.

"I think it was chiefly the death of his wife," said Colin. "Anyhow, he went all to pieces about two years ago, and ended up by getting run over in the Fulham Road. They brought him along to St. Christopher's, where we managed to patch him up. I felt sorry for the poor chap, and when he came out I got him that job at the Motor Club. As people go, I think he's by way of being rather grateful."

He swung clear of the traffic outside the Ritz, and with a warning bark from the horn the little car leaped forward down the long, brilliantly lit slope.

Turning up her coat collar with one hand, Nancy settled herself contentedly in her seat.

"It's been a most exciting evening," she said. "I've enjoyed every single minute of it."

"So have I," agreed Colin with enthusiasm. "What do you say to repeating the experiment next week?"

"Only on one condition," replied Nancy. "I've got to take my turn in paying for dinner."

"But that's absurd!" protested Colin. "I'm a great deal richer than you are."

"No, you're not," was the indignant answer. "Why, I'm simply rolling in money. I've no expenses now except the rent of my studio, and Dr. Ashton pays me at least twice what I'm worth."

"I don't believe that," said Colin. "Still, if you're determined to be proud and ostentatious I suppose you must have your way."

He swerved to the left behind St. George's Hospital, and, cutting through the select precincts of Belgrave Square, came out within a few yards of the King's Road. In another minute they were turning the corner into Jubilee Place.

"Next week's a bargain, then," said Colin, as they stood facing each other on the empty pavement. "It's no good trying to fix a day at present; I'll just ring up one morning, and we'll arrange it over the phone."

Nancy nodded. "That will be best," she said. "You mustn't desert the Professor—not unless he can manage all right without you."

She gave him her hand, which Colin squeezed in a friendly grip.

"Good night, Nancy," he said. "Sleep well, and when you see Mark, tell him that for once in his life he actually prescribed the right treatment."

He waited until the front door had closed behind her, and then, having lit himself a cigarette, climbed

back into the car, and started off again in the direction of Campden Hill.

It was a few minutes after midnight when he let himself in at the outer gate of the Red Lodge. The light was still burning in the hall, and, knowing from experience that the Professor frequently continued his work until the early hours of the morning, he walked straight through to the laboratory and tapped lightly on the door.

As he half expected, there was a creak of footsteps inside, and the Professor himself, wearing an old Jaeger dressing-gown, appeared on the threshold. At the same moment a peculiarly acrid and unpleasant smell drifted past him into the passage.

"So you've come back, eh?" he said in his queer, high-pitched voice. "I hope you enjoyed your evening?"

"I didn't do badly," replied Colin. "I went to Shadwell, saw my friends, had a forty-mile run in the car, and finished up with a dinner and a theatre."

The old man nodded grimly. "It sounds rather an exhausting form of recreation. I should imagine that after all that you must be quite ready for your bed."

"Oh, I'm not tired," said Colin, "not in the slightest. If you've got anything on hand I should like to come in and make myself useful."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," returned the Professor. "You will help yourself to a whisky

and soda, and then you will go straight upstairs to your room."

Colin hesitated. "And how about you, sir? Surely you've done enough work for to-day?"

"I shall be following you shortly," was the answer. "I am only waiting to see the result of a small experiment."

He nodded a curt good night, and, stepping back again into the laboratory, closed the door behind him.

Dismissed in this unceremonious fashion, Colin made his way into the dining-room, where he found a plate of sandwiches and a siphon set out ready for him on a tray. It was unthinkable that such an idea could have occurred to the unaided intelligence of Mrs. Ramsay, and, rather surprised at the Professor's consideration, he proceeded to mix a drink, which he carried with him up the staircase.

His room was situated on the first floor—a large, comfortable apartment looking out towards the back. It had been fitted up since his arrival with a gas stove, and, having lighted this, and placed his tumbler upon the dressing-table, he began in a leisurely fashion to get ready for bed.

The chief subject that occupied his thoughts was the revelation which Nancy had made to him at dinner. What on earth had induced Major Fenton to concoct that ridiculous story about a scandal at St. Christopher's Hospital? That it was an invention of his own Colin felt certain, and no man would

take the responsibility of fathering such a lie unless he had some particularly strong object in view.

Could he have fallen in love with Nancy himself? If that were the case it would certainly supply a possible motive. Passion has a queer effect upon some characters, and the mere thought of her making friends with anyone else might have filled him with such furious resentment that he had clutched at the first conceivable chance of breaking off their acquaintance.

It was a likely enough solution; and yet, somehow or other, it left Colin unconvinced. He had carried away a very unfavourable impression of Nancy's self-adopted guardian, but it was an impression that declined to fit in with this otherwise plausible theory. Unless his judgment were badly at fault, there was a hard, calculating selfishness stamped upon every line of the man's face. People of that sort are not swept off their feet by sudden outbursts of romantic jealousy, nor—which was another and extremely significant consideration—do they concern themselves unduly over the welfare of a dead friend's offspring.

It was this latter point, indeed, which puzzled Colin completely. He felt convinced that Major Fenton must have had some secret purpose in hunting Nancy out and practically forcing his acquaintance upon her. His story about a twenty-year-old friendship with her father would have sounded well enough in a sentimental novel, but having seen the

gentleman for himself, and having had an illuminating example of his ideas of honour and fair play, Colin found the explanation uncommonly difficult to swallow.

Perhaps Inspector Marsden and his colleagues at the Yard would be able to throw some light on the problem. It would be interesting at least to know a little about the Major's career, and whether his past record was at all in keeping with this sudden excursion into philanthropy.

There was another possible source of information in the person of Mr. Medwin. The two men were certainly acquainted, otherwise Fenton's photograph would not have been adorning the mantelpiece in Albert Terrace. When he visited the house again he could easily find an opportunity to make some casual inquiry concerning the original, only it must be done in a sufficiently tactful manner not to arouse the lawyer's curiosity.

In any case, this alternative course could be postponed until he had received the Inspector's report. The odds were that, if there was really anything shady in Fenton's history, Marsden would succeed in unearthing it, and since Nancy seemed to be thoroughly capable of looking after herself, another week's delay was not likely to produce any tragical consequences.

With this consoling reflection Colin donned his pyjamas, and, turning out the fire, clambered into bed. He was just in that pleasantly drowsy stage

when one feels half reluctant to fall asleep, and, lying there with the light on, he allowed his thoughts to drift back contentedly over the various details of his two meetings with Nancy.

It was an agreeable occupation, and the longer he indulged in it the more he began to realise what a very necessary part of his life she had already become. A kind of instinctive friendship seemed to have sprung up between them at their first encounter, and, although he had been unable to see her again until to-day, the interval had certainly not succeeded in making the faintest difference.

She was a girl in a thousand, there was no doubt about that! Mark evidently thought so, and, since he compared all women with Mary, his standard was about as high as anyone could reasonably demand. How enchantingly pretty she had looked as they had sat opposite to each other at dinner. He had only to shut his eyes and——

Hallo! What the devil was that?

The sound had come from somewhere down below—a queer, half-deadened noise, like the distant crash of breaking glass.

In a second Colin was out of bed and had flung open the door. The lights were still burning exactly as he had left them, and, striding to the banisters, he peered over into the hall. Nothing seemed to be stirring; except for the steady ticking of the grandfather clock the whole house was as silent as a tomb.

With a momentary feeling of relief he moved towards the staircase. It was probably only some small accident ; the Professor had most likely dropped a tumbler or broken a retort, and in the stillness of the night the noise had been naturally exaggerated. All the same, it would be just as well to have a look round.

Running lightly down in his bare feet, he crossed the hall and knocked at the laboratory door.

"It's I—Gray," he called out. "Anything wrong, sir ?"

As he spoke he turned the handle, and the next moment he found himself standing in the open doorway, staring blankly in front of him.

The room was empty.

For the first time a real sense of misgiving suddenly took possession of him. He wheeled sharply round, and, hurrying back through the hall, rapped loudly at the door of the study.

"Mr. Carter," he shouted, "are you there ?"

There was no answer.

He caught hold of the brass knob, only to make another and still more ominous discovery. Somebody had turned the key from inside.

With a quick breath he stepped back a couple of paces, and then, hunching up his shoulder, hurled himself against the panel. Under the impact of twelve stone and a few odd pounds the lock gave with a splintering crash which echoed through the house. The door swung open, and at the same

moment the shrill scream of a terrified woman rang out from the top landing.

Clutching the broken woodwork to steady himself, Colin fumbled for the switch. His fingers closed on it in the darkness, and, half prepared as he was for some horror, an involuntary cry broke from his lips as the whole room flared suddenly into light.

Face upwards, in the centre of the french windows, lay the huddled figure of the Professor. One arm was twisted under him, and his white hair was dabbled in a stream of blood which still oozed slowly from a gaping wound in his forehead.

At the sight of that hideous injury, all Colin's professional training instinctively asserted itself. Letting go the switch, he sprang forward, and, heedless of the blood and broken glass, dropped down on one knee beside the prostrate body.

It needed no medical knowledge to see that the case was hopeless. A terrific blow from some blunt instrument had smashed the whole front of the skull, and portions of the crushed and bleeding brain were even now protruding from the wound. Death must have come with merciful abruptness—a sudden and utter annihilation of every sense and feeling.

Almost dazed by the blast of fury that swept through him, Colin stumbled to his feet. He glanced wildly round the room, and the broken french window, one half of which was standing open, immediately caught his eye. Since the door had been locked from inside, it was the only way by which the murderer could have escaped. He had evidently darted through into the garden with the intention of climbing the wall, and, moved by a desperate hope, Colin stepped across the dead body and ran out on to the lawn. A flood of moonlight, streaming in through the bare trees, lit up the whole desolate expanse of grass and shrubs. Everything

was perfectly still, and, except for the faint rumbling of a cart in the distance, the entire neighbourhood seemed to be plunged in absolute silence.

He was listening intently, with his eyes on the black line of bushes opposite, when a slight noise in the room behind attracted his attention. He turned round instantly, and through the window he caught sight of the panic-stricken figure of Mrs. Ramsay peering in at the open doorway.

As he moved forward into the light she uttered a stifled scream.

"Don't be frightened," he said quickly. "It's I—Dr. Gray."

Clutching at her dressing-gown with one hand, she pointed a trembling finger towards the body.

"Oh, sir," she gasped, "what is it? What's been happening?"

Colin stood in the window, his face white and set.

"The Professor has been murdered," he said.

She stared at him for a moment, as though his words conveyed no meaning; then with a pitiful sound, like the whimpering of a beaten dog, she staggered back against the wall.

Colin strode forward and took her by the arm.

"You must pull yourself together," he said curtly. "This is no time for hysterics. I want your help—now—at once."

As he expected, his almost brutal words had the desired result. She stopped crying, and once more

her terrified glance travelled round in the direction of the dead man.

" Who—who killed him ? "

Colin shook his head. " I don't know. When I came down the study door was locked from inside. I broke it open and found him lying here—like this."

" It must have been the same man," she whispered ; " the one who tried to burgle his desk." She caught hold of Colin's sleeve, and looked up imploringly into his face. " Oh, sir, can't nothing be done ? Isn't there——"

" I am going to telephone to the police. While I'm doing it I want you to stand outside in the hall, so that you can see into the room. If you hear the smallest sound or movement in the garden call to me at once."

She gazed fearfully towards the broken window.

" Do you think he's out there, sir, hiding in the bushes ? "

" I think he's a quarter of a mile away by this time. All the same, until the police arrive the room mustn't be left unwatched for a single moment."

He waited until she had obeyed his instructions, and then, with a final glance round, walked swiftly down the passage and took off the receiver.

" Get me on to Scotland Yard as soon as possible," he said.

There was a note of urgency in his demand which must have carried conviction even to the mind of the

clerk, for in something less than ten seconds the reply came.

"Scotland Yard speaking. Who's that?"

"Dr. Colin Gray. Can you tell me if Inspector Marsden is still there?"

"I think so. Hold on a minute and I'll find out."

A pause followed.

"Hallo!" exclaimed a voice. "I'm Marsden. What's the matter, doctor? I didn't expect to hear from you again at this time of night."

"It's a bad business," said Colin quietly. "I'm speaking from the Red Lodge, Campden Hill. I have just found Professor Carter lying dead in his study."

"Dead!" came the sharp rejoinder. "How did he die?"

"He has been murdered."

He heard a sudden exclamation at the other end of the wire.

"Murdered! Goodness, doctor! Are you certain of what you're saying?"

"Perfectly certain. He has been murdered by some man who broke into the house after I had gone to bed. The whole front of his skull has been smashed to pieces."

There was a brief silence, followed by a few indistinct words, as though Marsden had turned round and was addressing someone else. Then his voice came again, clear and peremptory.

"When did this happen?"

"About six or seven minutes ago."

"How did the man escape?"

"I think he ran out into the garden and climbed over the wall."

"Is there anyone else in the house besides you?"

"There are two old servants. One of them is watching the room now."

"You had better go back yourself, and stop there until we arrive. Leave everything exactly as you found it. Don't disturb the body and don't touch or move a single object. We shall be with you in a quarter of an hour. Do you quite understand?"

"Quite," said Colin.

He hung up the receiver as the detective rang off, and, shivering slightly from the cold, made his way back to where he had left the housekeeper.

"They're coming down almost at once," he said. "I'll wait here and let them in."

She moved back, as though glad to escape from the sight of the room.

"Then I'd better go up and get your dressing-gown," she replied. "You'll catch your death standing about like that with nothing on."

Colin nodded gratefully. "You might fetch me some slippers, too, while you're about it," he said. "You'll find a pair alongside the bed. I turned out in such a hurry I forgot to put them on."

With trembling steps, and holding tightly to the banisters, Mrs. Ramsay slowly ascended the staircase. She returned in a few minutes carrying the

desired articles, and, stepping forward to meet her, Colin took them from her hand.

"Thanks so much," he exclaimed. "Now I think the best thing you can do is to get back to your room. I expect the police will want to see you when they come, but until then——"

Mrs. Ramsay shook her head.

"It wouldn't be no use, sir. I couldn't close my eyes, not if you was to offer me a thousand pounds." She turned again towards the stairs. "Besides, there's Mrs. Wilson—the cook, you know, sir. I've got to go and look after her."

"What's the matter? Is she ill?" demanded Colin.

"I heard her screaming," was the answer. "I shouldn't wonder if anything had happened, what with being woke up sudden and her having a weak heart."

"People don't often die from shock," said Colin. "Take her up a drop of brandy out of the dining-room, and you had better have a little yourself at the same time."

He thrust his feet into the slippers, and, putting on his dressing-gown, re-entered the study.

Unlike most people whose ideas on the subject are drawn chiefly from sensational novels, Colin knew that the surest way of assisting a criminal was for some well-meaning amateur to conduct a few preliminary investigations before the arrival of the police. During his four years at the hospital he had

twice been called upon to give evidence in cases of murder, and the experience had convinced him that it was only when a properly qualified detective was first in the field that any really valuable clues were likely to be forthcoming. Marsden's urgent instructions over the telephone had therefore been unnecessary ; even without them he would certainly have waited for the Inspector's appearance before attempting any further interference with the existing condition of the room.

He walked across to where the Professor was lying and looked down again at the body. The sight filled him with a mingled grief and anger that were almost unbearable. He had revered the dead man with all the ardour of a disciple, and, in addition to this lifelong homage, their close intimacy during the last few weeks had produced other and still stronger ties. In spite of the old scientist's rather dictatorial manner, his attitude throughout had been so extraordinarily kind and generous that a very real, if half-unconscious, affection for him had gradually sprung up in Colin's heart. The thought that the murder had been committed while he was actually in the house only increased the horror and bitterness of the whole affair. No excuses could alter his feeling that he had failed miserably—failed in the very duty for which he had been selected and employed.

Self-reproaches, however, were of little use now, and with a tremendous effort he wrenched his mind back to the immediate problem that confronted it.

Why, why, should anyone have wished to kill the Professor, and how had it come about that the latter's body was lying where it did? In order to reach the study from the laboratory one had to pass through the whole length of the hall. Colin's hearing was particularly acute, and he felt positive that the creak of footsteps or the opening or shutting of a door would instantly have attracted his attention. Nothing of the sort had happened. Until that one crash of breaking glass the whole house had been absolutely silent.

His eyes fell upon the damaged lock, and another question suddenly presented itself. Who had been responsible for turning the key? Surely it could not have been the Professor. If he had entered the room expecting to find it empty, what conceivable reason could he have had for fastening himself in? If, on the other hand, he had entertained even the remotest suspicion that somebody was hiding on the premises, he would certainly have come upstairs before attempting to approach the study.

It seemed more likely that the murderer had locked the door after committing the crime, so that he might have a better chance of making his escape. There was a coolness about the proceeding which suggested that he was fully aware of Colin's presence in the house, and a conviction that the whole thing had been planned and carried out with the most cold-blooded deliberation forced itself gradually upon the young surgeon's mind.

Had Mrs. Ramsay been right? Was it the same man who had ransacked the Professor's desk?

If it were so—and all the circumstances seemed to point to that conclusion—burglary and not murder had probably been the real object of his visit. There was evidently something in the place, some document or paper, of which he was desperately anxious to obtain possession. Having failed to find it at his first attempt, he had apparently returned to the house a second time in order to make another and more exhaustive search.

By some fatal chance the Professor must have taken it into his head to enter the study just after the intruder had succeeded in gaining admittance. On finding the window open he had naturally stepped forward to close it, only to receive a murderous blow out of the darkness, which had sent him crashing into the glass.

The one fact which refused to fit in with this theory was the entire absence of any sound right up to the actual moment of the crime. There must, of course, be some explanation, and Colin was puzzling his brains in a vain attempt to discover it when the loud peal of a bell suddenly jangled out from the kitchen.

Just pausing to gather his dressing-gown about him, he hurried down the passage-way to the outer door, which he unfastened and opened. A large car was drawn up in the roadway, and five men, two

of them uniformed constables, were standing in a group on the pavement.

Inspector Marsden, who was in the centre, immediately came forward.

"Well, what's happened, doctor?" he inquired curtly. "Anything fresh to report?"

Colin shook his head. "Only what I told you over the telephone," he replied. "The Professor is dead, and the man who murdered him has escaped."

"That's enough to go on with, anyhow," returned the detective. "Jackson, you and Roberts stop here for the present. If anyone attempts to leave the house arrest them at once."

With an obedient salute the two constables fell back, and, followed by his other companions, Marsden mounted the steps.

"This is Dr. Sinclair, our divisional surgeon," he nnounced. "He tells me that he has already had he pleasure of meeting you."

Colin shook hands with a tall, grey-bearded man, whose face seemed vaguely familiar.

"And this," continued the Inspector, "is Detecive-Sergeant Humphries, of the Fingerprint Department. Now I think the first thing we'll do s to go in and have a look at the body. I'll take our statement as soon as the doctor has finished his xamination."

Without offering any comment, Colin conducted hem down the corridor, and, leading the way across he hall, brought them to the door of the study.

Marsden halted in the entrance, and stood staring silently at the tragic spectacle in front of him.

"You followed my instructions?" he asked. "Everything is exactly as you found it!"

"Exactly," said Colin.

"Then I'll ask you two gentlemen to wait here for a moment. There's just one point I should like to make certain about before anyone touches the body."

He pulled out a notebook from his inside pocket, and, beckoning to his colleague, stepped forward into the room.

Dr. Sinclair moved across to where Colin was standing.

"I don't suppose you remember me," he said, "but I called in at St. Christopher's last year in connection with one of your cases." He nodded towards the two detectives, both of whom were kneeling down beside the dead man. "This is a very terrible business," he added. "I was horrified when I heard that it was Professor Carter."

Colin, whose mind was in no state for conversation, made an effort to collect his thoughts.

"Did you know him personally?" he asked.

The surgeon shook his head. "No," he replied. "Like everyone else, I was a great admirer of his work, but I never had the honour of being introduced to him. The police tell me that you were acting as his resident assistant."

"I came here straight from the hospital," said

Colin. "I had been with him for nearly a month."

"It seems such a particularly brutal and senseless crime," continued the other, after a short pause. "One would think that even the most callous ruffian would hesitate about striking down an old man of over eighty." He glanced at Colin's dressing-gown. "I gather that the murderer broke into the house after you had gone to bed?"

Colin was about to answer when the Inspector got up suddenly and turned towards the door.

"We've seen all we want to for the present, doctor. Perhaps you'll be good enough to have a look at the body now, and let's hear your opinion?"

The surgeon hurried forward, and, following him slowly into the room, Colin seated himself on the corner of the sofa. From this position he was able to watch the proceedings of all three of his companions, none of whom for the moment betrayed any desire to interrogate him further. Dr. Sinclair, after taking off his coat, became wholly absorbed in his professional duties. Marsden appeared to be busy making notes, while the sergeant, who had produced an electric torch and a large magnifying glass, stepped down into the garden and began a minute examination of the still open french window.

At last, after a lapse of several minutes, the surgeon rose to his feet.

"It is a clear case of deliberate murder," he said slowly. "The Professor was struck on the temple

by some blunt weapon—probably a jemmy. There is no doubt that he was killed instantly. I should think he has been dead for about twenty minutes."

The Inspector turned to Colin. "You were the first to view the body," he remarked. "Is there anything in the doctor's report with which you are not in agreement?"

"Nothing," replied Colin. "I came to the same conclusion myself directly I examined the wound."

Marsden pulled a chair up to the table, and the sergeant, who had been listening from the window, stepped forward and joined him.

"I want the full facts now, Dr. Gray," he said brusquely. "Tell us in your own words exactly what happened from the moment you returned to the house."

Amid a profound silence, broken only by the occasional scratching of the Inspector's pencil, Colin proceeded to relate his story. Starting with his talk to the Professor at the laboratory door, he went on step by step to describe the whole of his subsequent experiences right up to the arrival of his present companions. He kept strictly to the bare facts, making no attempt to explain his own views, and all three of his audience listened to him with an absorbed interest, which showed itself plainly in their faces.

It was only when he had quite finished that the Inspector offered his first comment.

"Well, I wish everyone could make a statement

like that," he said approvingly. "It would save us a lot of trouble in the course of the year." He leaned forward, and ran his eye over the various notes which he had jotted down while Colin was speaking. "This other burglary that the housekeeper referred to," he inquired ; "when did that take place ?"

"I think it was about three months ago," said Colin, after a moment's reflection. "I wasn't here at the time ; in fact, there was no one else in the house except Mrs. Ramsay and the cook. That was really the chief reason why the Professor decided to engage an assistant."

"Why weren't the police notified ?" demanded the Inspector. "There was certainly no report sent in to the Yard."

"The Professor declared that he didn't want to waste his time. He was a very busy man, and as nothing appeared to have been stolen he decided to let the whole matter drop."

"Nothing stolen !" repeated Marsden, raising his eyebrows. "Are you perfectly certain about that ?"

"It's what he told me, anyhow," replied Colin. "According to him, the only damage they did was to smash open his desk and search his papers."

Both men glanced across the room in the direction of the oak bureau.

"Is that the desk ?" inquired the Sergeant.

Colin nodded.

" Had he any idea what they were after ? "

" Not the slightest. All his papers which are of any scientific value are kept in the laboratory. I believe he had some money and valuables in the safe, but they seem to have left that entirely alone."

There was a brief silence, and then, without saying anything, the Sergeant got up from his chair and walked over towards the two pieces of furniture in question. Marsden remained seated, his keen blue eyes fixed thoughtfully upon Colin's face.

" What's your opinion, doctor ? " he asked at last.

" I am inclined to agree with Mrs. Ramsay," said Colin. " I think it was the same man who broke into the house before. He was evidently searching for some particular paper or document, and as he couldn't find it in the desk he came back a second time to try and open the safe. On his first visit he probably hadn't got the necessary tools with him."

" And how about the murder ? "

Colin hesitated. " There's one thing I don't understand," he frankly admitted. " I left the Professor working in the laboratory, and it's a mystery to me how he managed to reach the study without my hearing him. I was awake the whole time, and I can swear that there wasn't a sound."

" Well, I can explain that to you," said the Inspector. " Mr. Carter didn't cross the hall ; he entered the room by the window."

With a sudden exclamation Colin started to his feet.

"By Jove, what an idiot I am!" he exclaimed. "I never thought of that. Of course, there's a side door from the laboratory into the garden."

"I imagined that there must be," said Marsden, "and I haven't the least doubt that we shall find it unlocked." He got up from his chair and glanced at the police surgeon, who was standing by himself in front of the fire. "I don't think we need keep you any longer, Dr. Sinclair," he added. "I'll let you know what time we fix for the P.M. as soon as I've seen Ashford."

The surgeon, who seemed ready enough to depart, picked up his hat and coat.

"You can tell him to phone me at my house," he replied. "I shall be there till midday for certain."

He nodded a general good night, and, accepting Colin's offer to escort him to the front door, accompanied the latter through the hall and down the outer corridor.

"We shall be bound to come across each other again during the next few days," he said as they shook hands. "I only hope that when all this is over we shall have the pleasure of meeting under less distressing circumstances."

Colin returned some more or less suitably polite rejoinder, and, shutting the door, made his way back to the study.

He found the two detectives standing in front of the safe, the sergeant stooping down and apparently engaged in some experiment with the lock.

Marsden looked round at his entrance.

"We'll leave Humphries to finish up here," he said. "I want you to take me to the laboratory; and afterwards, if you'll call down the servants, I'd like to have a few minutes' conversation with both of them."

"I don't suppose you'll get much out of the cook," said Colin doubtfully. "According to Mrs. Ramsay, she's collapsed for the night."

"She'll talk all right," was the somewhat cynical answer. "Women can always pull themselves together if there's a chance of using their tongues."

He stepped forward briskly, and, following Colin to the back of the house, turned down the side passage which led to the laboratory.

The door of the latter apartment was still open, and at the sight of the big, brilliantly lit interior he pulled up with an exclamation of surprise.

"Hallo!" he remarked. "I'd no idea it was such a size. The old man must have been pretty well off if he could afford to run up places like this."

He glanced round the room as though in search of the additional exit, and, without waiting for his question, Colin pointed towards a high screen which jutted out at right angles from the wall.

"It's behind there," he explained. "I never thought of looking to see if it was open. The Professor told me that he only used it in summer-time."

" He used it to-night," was the detective's reply. " If he hadn't he would probably be alive now."

As he spoke he descended the steps, and, with Colin in close attendance, strode confidently towards the spot. They came to a halt in front of a small oak door, flush with the wall, and, catching hold of the handle, Marsden gave it a sharp turn. The next moment a gust of cold wind was blowing in their faces, and they were staring across the lawn in the direction of the study windows, from which a flood of yellow light streamed out into the darkness of the garden.

It was the Inspector who first broke the silence.

" That's clear enough as far as it goes," he observed. " The question is, Why did he open the door at one o'clock in the morning ? "

A possible explanation suddenly occurred to Colin.

" I shouldn't wonder if he wanted to let in a little fresh air. He'd been making an experiment, and there was a horrible smell in the room when I spoke to him at the doorway."

" You've got it," was Marsden's laconic answer. He pulled out an electric torch, a duplicate of the sergeant's, and allowed the light to play backwards and forwards over the patch of gravel outside. " I don't suppose there will be any footprints," he continued. " It's been freezing too infernally hard for that, and, in any case, we shall only do more harm than good by trampling all over the place in the

dark." He switched off the torch, and, closing and locking the door, put away the key in his pocket.

"We'll get back now," he added, "and if you'll give me a hand I think we'll move the Professor's body into his own bedroom. When we've done that you can call down the servants."

They returned to the study, where they found Humphries still examining the safe, and after the Inspector had exchanged a few words with his subordinate, he and Colin set about their task.

Lifting the frail, bloodstained figure between them, they carried it slowly up the staircase as far as the first landing. The Professor's room was situated right at the end of the corridor, a large, sparsely furnished apartment with an old-fashioned four-poster in the farther corner. They laid their burden on the bed, and Marsden stood up, cap in hand, while Colin sponged away the blood and covered over the body with a clean sheet.

"It's a wretched sort of ending to a life like his," said the detective, with an unexpected touch of feeling. "One of the greatest scholars in the world, so they tell me ; and look at him now—knocked on the head and done for, just like any common drunk in a street fight !" He paused. "I'm not a rich man," he added, "but I'd give a couple of month's pay to put a rope round the neck of the party who did this."

He walked to the door, and, replacing his cap, glanced up at the landing above.

"You might give the servants a call now, doctor," he said. "Don't frighten 'em; just say that if they feel up to it I'd like to have a nice friendly little chat in the study." He dived into his pocket and once more pulled out his notebook. "By the way, can you tell me the name and address of the Professor's solicitor? We shall have to get hold of him the first thing in the morning."

"It's a Mr. Medwin," said Colin. "He lives close by here in Albert Terrace, but I'm hanged if I can remember his number."

"That doesn't matter," returned Marsden. "I can easily look him up in the telephone directory."

He jotted down the name, and, replacing the book in his pocket, laid his hand on Colin's arm.

"There'll be no need for you to stay up any longer," he said. "Both Humphries and I have got plenty to keep us busy until breakfast-time. You turn in and get some sleep as soon as you've brought down the servants."

Colin, who was beginning to feel distinctly weary, contented himself with a nod.

"You'll know where to find me," he said, pointing to his room. "If there's anything you happen to want just give me a call."

He left his companion at the end of the passage and mounted the second flight, which led up to the servants' quarters. Somewhat to his surprise, he found Mrs. Ramsay and the cook, both fully

dressed, standing on the small landing at the head of the stairs.

"We couldn't stop in bed," explained the former, "not after we heard the bell ring. Oh, sir, what do the police say? Have they——"

"The Inspector wants to have a few minutes' talk with both of you," he said. "Of course, if Mrs. Wilson doesn't feel well enough——"

The cook drew herself up with a suggestion of injured pride.

"I know my duty, sir," she remarked. "If the police wishes for my hevidence they shall have it heven if I drop dead on the carpet, the same as my poor mother did before me."

There being apparently nothing further to be said, Colin conducted his charges as far as the study, where he found the two detectives waiting to receive them. He remained just long enough to make the necessary introductions, and then, availing himself of Marsden's suggestion, returned upstairs again to his own room.

Now that his services were no longer needed an irresistible reaction had suddenly set in. He felt tired out in mind and body, and, scarcely conscious of anything but an intense desire for sleep, he threw off his dressing-gown, and, for the second time that evening, clambered thankfully into bed.

* * * * *

It seemed to him as though he had scarcely laid

his head upon the pillow when he was abruptly aroused by a touch on the shoulder. He sat up with a start, and, rubbing his eyes, perceived a burly and familiar figure standing beside him in the gloom.

" Hallo, Inspector ! " he exclaimed. " What's the matter ? Anything wrong ?"

" Only the time," returned his visitor. " It's just gone eight, and as we're expecting Mr. Medwin at nine I thought I'd better give you a knock-up."

With rather a rueful laugh Colin threw back the clothes.

" How about breakfast ? " he inquired. " Have you made any arrangements ? "

" The cook's on the job," was the encouraging answer. " I was careful to keep on the right side of her last night, and she's promised us a dish of eggs and bacon at a quarter past."

" I'll be there," said Colin, thrusting a leg over the side. " How did you and the sergeant get on after I'd gone to bed ? "

" Well, we haven't altogether wasted our time," said Marsden, turning towards the door. " I won't hang about in your way now, however. You shall have the news—such as it is—while we're waiting for the solicitor."

He disappeared with a friendly nod, and, after indulging in a cold tub and a somewhat hasty toilet, Colin followed him downstairs to the dining-room.

His arrival synchronised almost exactly with that

of Mrs. Ramsay, who appeared from the kitchen carrying a well-laden tray. She arranged the contents on the breakfast-table, which was already set out, at the same time expressing an apologetic hope that if there were any shortcomings they might be attributed to the natural agitation of herself and the cook. She then retired, and with an air of businesslike alacrity the two detectives drew up their chairs.

"This will just suit my complaint," observed Marsden, uncovering the eggs and bacon. "I was never a believer in working on an empty stomach, and I reckon Humphries here is pretty much of the same opinion."

"There were some sandwiches and whisky on the sideboard last night," said Colin. "I ought to have told you before I went to bed."

"Oh, we found them all right," returned Marsden with a smile. "And, for the matter of that, some very excellent cigars, too." He helped his companions to a generous portion each, and transferred the remainder to his own plate. "I only wish," he added grimly, "that we'd been equally successful in our professional discoveries."

"Have you any clue at all?" asked Colin.

"Depends on what you call a clue," was the answer. "I can tell you one thing for a certainty. Whoever broke into the house was an old hand at the game, and, what's more, a chap who knew his job from A to Z."

" Why do you think that ? "

" Well, you're not likely to find an amateur burglar who can cut out a pane of glass without making a sound, nor yet one who wears gloves so as to hide his finger prints. Besides, no one but an expert cracksman could possibly have forced the lock of the safe."

" I didn't know it was forced," said Colin.

" One bolt had gone, anyhow ; and a very neat bit of work it was too, eh, Humphries ? "

The sergeant, whose mouth was full, confined himself to an affirmative grunt.

" That rather knocks the bottom out of my theory," said Colin, after a short pause.

" It simplifies things a good deal from our point of view," returned the Inspector. " Directly we can get a crime into a particular class we're half-way towards finding the man who did it. You see, there are never more than a certain number of skilled burglars out of prison, and it's the Yard's business to keep a pretty close eye on what they're up to. Roughly speaking, a case like this narrows itself down to about twenty or thirty likely parties. By to-night they'll all have been put through it, and if there's a single one who can't account exactly for what he was doing he'll—well, he'll be what the newspapers call ' detained for further inquiries.' "

" Do you think it was the same man who broke in before ? " asked Colin.

Marsden looked doubtful. " It may be, of

course, and if that's so there's probably more in the case than appears on the surface. A man like the Professor might very well have had papers and secrets that certain people were anxious to get hold of, and it's quite on the cards that they might have taken in a professional thief to do their dirty work for them. The trouble is that at present we know practically nothing about his private life."

"I can't help you there," said Colin. "I believe that Mr. Medwin was the only person who was at all in his confidence."

"Well, Mr. Medwin will be able to answer for himself in a few minutes. Our next best hope is to get on to the track of this old manservant Kennedy. He seems to have been with the Professor for about forty years, so if he's still alive he might be able to give us some useful information."

"I expect Mrs. Ramsay or the cook could let you have his address."

"I asked them last night, but neither of them has the least notion where he is. From the way they spoke I gather that there was precious little love lost between them. However, he will probably show up as soon as he reads about the murder, and, if not, we oughtn't to have much difficulty——"

A ring at the front door bell interrupted his words, and, glancing at the clock, he gulped down the remainder of his tea.

"I wonder if this is our man," he added. "You don't often find a solicitor ahead of his time." He

turned to Colin as Mrs. Ramsay's steps were heard crossing the hall. "Just a word of caution, doctor. He knows nothing about the murder yet, and I've told the old lady to keep her tongue quiet while she's showing him in. Leave me to break the news if you will; I've a fancy to see how he takes it."

Colin's only reply was a nod, and the three of them sat in silence until the door opened and Mrs. Ramsay appeared on the threshold, with the massive form of Mr. Medwin looming up behind her.

The solicitor, who was wearing a frock-coat and carrying a top hat in his hand, took a couple of paces forward. Then with an air of surprise he came to a sudden halt.

The Inspector rose instantly.

"Let me introduce myself, Mr. Medwin. I am Inspector Marsden, of Scotland Yard."

Mr. Medwin bowed, his close-set eyes travelling swiftly over the other occupants of the room.

"Good morning," he said, in that peculiarly suave voice of his. "May I inquire what all this signifies?"

"Professor Carter has been murdered."

Marsden's answer came with startling bluntness, and there could be no question as to the effect that it produced. An expression of incredulous amazement flashed across the big man's face, and for a moment he stood gripping his hat and staring blankly at the speaker.

"Murdered?" he exclaimed at last. "Impossible! There must be some mistake."

"It's not the sort of thing that lends itself to mistakes," returned the detective.

Mr. Medwin drew in a long breath, and Colin, who was watching intently, saw that he was making a tremendous effort to recover his self-control.

"I think I had better sit down for a moment," he said slowly.

He moved forward, and, laying his hat on the corner of the table, sank into the vacant chair from which Marsden had just arisen.

"You must excuse me," he continued. "I feel half stunned by this appalling news. The Professor was one of my most valued friends." He moistened his lips and glanced up suddenly at the detective. "When did it happen?" he demanded.

"Last night," was the reply, "or, to be more exact, about a quarter to one this morning."

"Why wasn't I sent for before?"

Marsden stroked his moustache, and eyed the other with a kind of dispassionate interest.

"Well, Mr. Medwin, I appreciate the importance of your testimony, but as I happen to be responsible for this case you must permit me to conduct my investigation in the way that I consider best."

Instead of betraying any resentment at the snub, the solicitor merely nodded.

"Quite so," he assented readily. "Your first

step would naturally be to go into all the circumstances of the murder, and I was forgetting for a moment what a great deal of work it must have entailed." He paused. "Have you made any discoveries?" he asked. "Anything that could possibly be described as a clue?"

"Several," replied Marsden. "But I think it will save time if I give you the full details straight away. There are several peculiar features about the affair, and it's not much use discussing them until you are in possession of the facts."

Mr. Medwin sat down and folded his arms.

"Just exactly as you prefer," he remarked. "Please consider me entirely at your service."

Without wasting any more words Marsden entered upon a brief description of everything that had taken place from the moment when Colin had returned to the house. The curt and matter-of-fact fashion in which he told his story seemed somehow or other to heighten its dramatic horror, and, in spite of the solicitor's expressionless face, it was easy to see the strained attention with which he was following every word. Once or twice he seemed to be on the point of asking a question, but on each occasion he apparently changed his mind at the last moment, as though unwilling to interrupt the narrative.

"As far as I can see at present," concluded Marsden, "there are two probable lines of inquiry, both of which I propose to follow up. Either it

was an ordinary case of burglary, or else the thief was after some particular object that he believed to be hidden in the study. With regard to the actual murder, I am inclined to think that it was more or less of an accident. The silly fool got rattled when the old man came in at the window, and smashed his head in before he realised what he was doing. He has probably been cursing himself ever since."

"I should say that your first suggestion was the right one," remarked Mr. Medwin. "An old-fashioned house like this, shut away from the road, is exactly the sort of place that a professional burglar would select. It's very improbable there's anything more in it than that—a sordid attempt at house-breaking, ending up in a brutal and bloody murder."

"Well," returned Marsden slowly, "I'm not altogether satisfied on the point. Take the question of this previous attempt. Granting it was the same man, why did he content himself with merely examining the desk?"

The lawyer glanced swiftly in the direction of Colin.

"Is that what the Professor told you?" he asked.

Colin nodded.

"He said the same thing to me," continued the other, "but I remember wondering at the time whether his statement could really be trusted. Like so many gifted men, he was curiously careless in the matter of money. It's quite possible that he

may have had a bundle of notes in some drawer that he remembered nothing about."

"And you think that, having whetted his appetite, the thief came back for more?"

Marsden put the question quite casually.

Mr. Medwin spread out his hands. "Surely it's a more likely theory than to imagine the existence of some mysterious object that nobody has ever heard of?"

"I suppose that if the Professor had had any specially valuable paper or secret in his possession he would probably have mentioned the fact? I gather that you were entirely in his confidence?"

"Entirely, as far as his business arrangements were concerned."

"And how about his private affairs?"

The solicitor paused. "I am as much in the dark as you are with regard to them. On anything that concerned himself Mr. Carter was one of the most reticent men who ever lived."

"So I understand from Dr. Gray," returned the Inspector. "All the same, we shall have to look into the matter, and I should think the easiest way of doing it would be to get in touch with his old servant, Kennedy. Do you happen to know where he can be found?"

Colin, who was watching closely, thought that he detected a faint change of expression in the solicitor's face. If so, it passed away instantly.

"I haven't any idea," was the reply. "I am

afraid it's very likely that he's dead. He was partly paralysed when he left the Professor's service, and I don't imagine he would have lasted for more than a few months."

The Inspector walked to the window, and for a moment or two stared thoughtfully out into the garden.

"What about the estate?" he asked, turning round suddenly. "Who comes into the property?"

Mr. Medwin shrugged his shoulders. "There again I am completely at sea. I presume that it passes to the next of kin, but who that fortunate person may be I haven't the remotest notion."

"Hasn't Mr. Carter made a will?"

"Not that I am aware of. I suggested to him several times that he ought to take some steps in the matter, but he always made the excuse that he was too busy to be bothered about it at the moment. As so often happens in these cases, the opportunity has now gone by for ever."

"Then if no one comes forward the money passes to the Crown?"

"That is so; but it's not a situation which is likely to occur. In view of the large fortune at stake some claimant is certain to put in an appearance."

The Inspector raised his eyebrows. "A large fortune, eh?" he repeated. "Can you give us any idea of what it amounts to?"

Mr. Medwin reflected. "The Professor has

been saving money for years," he said slowly. "He drew a big income from his various patents, and his personal expenditure was comparatively trifling. Some of his experiments were naturally rather costly, but, all the same, there can be no doubt that he was an extremely wealthy man. As a rough estimate I should say that he was worth at least a couple of hundred thousand pounds."

"WE find that Professor Carter was wilfully murdered by some person or persons unknown."

The foreman of the jury, a stout, pompous little man who was evidently pleased with his temporary importance, announced the verdict in a loud and impressive voice.

A moment's silence followed as the Coroner wrote down the words, and then, amid a general murmur of voices and shuffling of papers, the crowded court commenced to break up.

Colin, who was sitting on one of the back benches, remained in his place while the building slowly emptied itself. At last, just as it was clearing, the Inspector and Mr. Medwin appeared together in the gangway, and, picking up his hat, he stepped out to join them.

The solicitor was the first to speak.

"An unsatisfactory verdict," he observed, "but, considering the entire lack of any definite evidence, I suppose it was the only one that could be expected."

"I've no complaint to make," remarked Marsden. "I should say that it summed up the situation exactly."

"Well, you're as much concerned with finding out the truth as either of us," returned the other,

"but I must confess to being a little disappointed that we've made no further progress. It seems extraordinary that a crime like this can be committed, and that there should be absolutely no clue to the murderer."

"It's a remarkable case all round," agreed Marsden. "One of its most peculiar features is the fact that no one has yet come forward to claim relationship with the Professor. I suppose you've discovered nothing fresh about his private affairs since our conversation yesterday?"

"Nothing," was the answer. "If I had I should have informed the Coroner. My own opinion is that before long we are bound to get on the right track, and in the meanwhile the only thing to do is to go on with the business of winding up the estate. I am working in conjunction with the solicitor for the Treasury, and he assures me that we shall be allowed plenty of time to make the most exhaustive inquiries before the Crown take any steps to put forward a claim." He turned to Colin. "By the way, I wanted to have a talk with you, Gray," he added. "I understand that your arrangement with the Professor was only a verbal one, but, all the same, I think you are at least entitled to six months' salary. I will discuss the point with the Treasury, and, should they raise no objection, I will take the responsibility of forwarding you a cheque."

"It's very good of you," said Colin coolly, "but if you won't think me ungrateful I would much

prefer that you allowed the matter to drop. I am not in need of money, and the small amount of work I did has already been exceedingly well paid for."

Mr. Medwin smiled benevolently.

"Just as you please," he observed. "It's refreshing to come across anyone who takes such a modest and unmercenary view of their services." He paused. "I have no idea what your plans are," he continued, "but should you be anxious to obtain some particular appointment I shall be only too delighted to do anything I can to assist you. I know that Mr. Carter entertained the very highest opinion of your abilities."

"I am not looking out for a new job at present," replied Colin bluntly. "I am going to find the man who murdered the Professor. There'll be time enough to think about my own affairs after he's been tried and hanged."

As he spoke the court clock chimed the hour, and with a sudden air of surprise Mr. Medwin pulled out his watch.

'One o'clock," he exclaimed. "I didn't realise it was so late. I have promised to lunch with a client of mine, so I'm afraid I must hurry off." He shook hands with each of them in turn. "I need hardly say I wish you both every success in your investigations. You will no doubt keep me informed of any discoveries you make, and sooner or later, if we all work together, I feel convinced that the truth will come out."

With a friendly nod he turned towards the door, and the next moment Colin and the Inspector were left alone.

"I don't know why it is," said Colin. "I've nothing against that chap, but somehow or other I feel dead certain that he's a wrong 'un."

"We shall be very unpopular if we stop and discuss the matter here," replied Marsden. "They've been waiting to shut the court for the last five minutes."

"Well, suppose we go and have some lunch," suggested Colin. "I know quite a decent place round the corner in the High Street, and there are one or two things I'd like to have a talk about if you're not in a great hurry."

"I was going to propose it myself," replied Marsden. "I've got one of our men coming down to take some photographs at the Red Lodge this afternoon. He'll be along about a quarter to two, so that will just spin out the time until he arrives."

They left the court, and a few minutes later they were seated at a table in a discreet little French restaurant, the stout proprietress of which greeted Colin with a motherly and familiar smile.

"It's curious you should have said that about our legal friend," began Marsden, as soon as they had given their order. "I don't set much store myself on what people call instincts ; I've seen too many of 'em go wrong. All the same, from the moment I clapped my eyes on this fellow Medwin

I've had a sort of feeling that he was keeping something up his sleeve."

"Something to do with the murder?" demanded Colin.

Marsden broke off a bit of crust and chewed it thoughtfully.

"On the whole I should say not," he replied. "There's no getting away from the fact that he was knocked all of a heap when he heard the news. I'm more inclined to think that he's up to some hanky-panky with regard to the old man's money. He may have a notion who the rightful heirs are, and, if so, he's probably lying low with the idea of making a bit out of it himself."

"What sort of a standing has he got in his profession?" asked Colin.

"Oh, good enough as far as it goes," returned the detective. "Still, I thought there'd be no harm in making a few inquiries, so I've asked Ainsworth to tackle the job himself. It will have to be done carefully, of course; if Medwin got wind of the fact he'd probably kick up the devil of a dust."

"Are you any further on at all with regard to the murder?" asked Colin.

Marsden gave a warning glance in the direction of the returning waiter, and for several minutes the two of them remained silent, while a deftly moving Italian attended to their needs.

"There's no point in informing the rest of the world," remarked Marsden, as soon as they were

alone again, " but, to tell you the truth, we seem to be up against a blank wall. I didn't say too much to the Coroner, chiefly on account of the newspapers. Some of them are always waiting for a chance to dig out the old stunt about the incompetence of Scotland Yard, so in a case like this it's just as well to give the impression that we're keeping something in the background. As a matter of cold fact, I only wish we were."

" What about those pet black sheep of yours ? " inquired Colin. " Haven't you succeeded in rounding them up yet ? "

" Oh, we've rounded 'em up all right. We've scraped through our list of regulars with a fine pocket-comb, and if any of them had so much as a finger in the job I'll eat my hat in this restaurant."

" Then you've changed your opinion ? " said Colin. " You're beginning to believe——"

Marsden shook his head. " No," he interrupted doggedly, " I'll stake my reputation that the man who opened the lock of that safe was a professional cracksman. He may have been a foreigner, of course, and if that's the case it would account for the fact that none of our people here know anything about him. However, I've cabled to Paris and New York, and several other places, to ask them if any of their own experts are missing, and it's quite possible I may get an answer from them that will put us on the right track. If I do I'll send you along a line." He paused to refill his glass. " By

the way," he added, "where shall I be able to find you?"

"I've taken a room at the Kensington Palace Hotel for a day or two," said Colin. "I've really made no plans yet. As I told Medwin, I mean to see this thing through before I attempt to settle down to any fresh work." He pushed away his plate, the contents of which he had hardly tasted, and lighted himself a cigarette. "How about the Professor's old servant?" he asked. "Any news of him yet?"

"That's another of our failures," admitted the detective wryly. "Ainsworth's men have been ransacking the country, but so far they seem to have drawn an absolute blank." He stopped suddenly, and, putting his hand in his pocket, produced a rather crumpled envelope. "Talking of Ainsworth, I've got something here for you. It's the report we promised you the other day about some party you wanted us to look up. I'd have posted it on before only you told me that you weren't in any particular hurry."

He passed over the note, and, hastily expressing his thanks, Colin tore open the flap. In the rush and excitement of recent events his interest in Major Fenton had been temporarily forgotten, but the mere mention of the subject was quite sufficient to arouse all his previous curiosity.

He extracted the sheet of paper which the envelope contained, and, unfolding it with eager

fingers, spread it out before him on the table. It was just a single page of neat typewriting, without any address or date.

*Major F. is the only son of the late John Mordaunt F., of Cheltenham, Glos. He is forty-three years of age. He was educated at Cheltenham College. Entered the 17th Lancers, but resigned his commission as a captain on account of financial difficulties. Was in India for several years and also in Canada. It is believed that he was chiefly engaged in training and selling polo ponies. Rejoined the Service during the war and rose to his present rank. Since then his only occupation appears to have been betting at race-meetings. He is connected with an undesirable element on the Turf, and his general reputation is not of the best. As far as this country is concerned, however, there is no record of his having been concerned in any criminal proceedings. He is an amateur yachtsman, and the registered owner of a small auxiliary-engined boat called "The Swallow," which is at present lying in Hole Haven.*

*This paper is to be destroyed as soon as its contents have been noted.*

As Colin reached the concluding paragraph the Inspector rose from his chair.

"I hope you've got the information you wanted," he said. "I must be off now, or I shall be late for my appointment. Are you coming along up to the house?"

Colin thrust away the paper in his inside pocket.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "I'd half promised to go down to Shadwell. My pal, the doctor there, is very keen to know the result of the inquest. Still, if there's any way in which I can be of help——"

Marsden beckoned to the waiter.

"No, no," he interrupted. "You stick to your arrangement. We're only going to take a few photographs of the study, just to show the exact position in which the body was lying. They may come in useful later on."

He asked for the bill, which, in spite of Colin's protest, he insisted upon paying, and, leaving the restaurant, they stepped out on to the crowded pavement.

"I'm making for the station," explained Colin. "My car's having some new valves fitted, so I shall go down by train."

"Well, so long for the present," was the Inspector's reply. "I'll let you know at the hotel directly there's any news, and if you should want to get in touch with me yourself you've only got to ring up the Yard. Even if I'm not there they can always send me a message."

With a parting handshake he disappeared among the traffic, and a few minutes later, having booked a ticket for Shadwell, Colin was descending the steps which led down to the underground railway.

As the train rumbled eastwards he again pulled out the paper which Marsden had handed him, and read it

through carefully a second time. Brief though it was, it certainly presented Major Fenton in a far from flattering light. Apart from its own uncomplimentary phrases, it suggested that the account of himself which he had given to Nancy was probably quite untrue. Whatever his exact reasons for going abroad might have been, it was clear that they had nothing to do with the demands of military service. That he had only returned to England in the spring was also apparently a piece of deliberate fiction. Unless the police were wrong, he had been a conspicuous figure at race-meetings ever since the conclusion of war ; conspicuous, too, in a fashion which seemed to clash rather badly with the chivalrous rôle he had adopted in his relations towards Nancy.

Had he really been acquainted with her father at all ? It was a question which Colin had already asked himself on several occasions, and in view of what he had just read his doubts on the subject became more pronounced than ever. The details of the story were so improbable, and the professed motive so extremely unlikely, that in the absence of any other evidence except the Major's own statement all his beliefs inclined in the opposite direction.

It seemed to him that Nancy ought certainly to be enlightened concerning the somewhat unreliable nature of her "guardian's" claims. The job was not a particularly attractive one, for she had given him no authority to make inquiries, and the character of an unauthorised Paul Pry is about the last

anyone would wish to assume. Besides, there was the awkward fact that Fenton had already cautioned Nancy against him, and it might well appear to a third person that in bringing this counter-charge he was merely gratifying his own private resentment.

Still, even at the risk of being misunderstood it was clearly his duty to put her on her guard. He would show her the report, and tell her frankly how it had come into his possession, and if the consequences proved to be unfortunate he must put up with them as best he could.

It was at the precise moment when he had arrived at this decision that the train ran into Whitechapel station. He got out in company with a number of other passengers bound for the less fashionable quarters of East End London, and, crossing the line by a covered bridge, descended into the narrow and dimly lit vault where passengers to Shadwell await their destiny.

As he reached the platform the figure of a man sitting by himself on a solitary bench suddenly attracted his attention, and, stepping promptly forward to the seat, he gave its occupant a sounding slap on the shoulder.

"Cheer up, Joe," he said. "There's sure to be a train some time to-day."

Mr. Joseph Bates—for it was none other than the ex-pugilist—jumped to his feet with a grin of welcome.

"Well, I'm blowed," he exclaimed. "Caught

me proper, that you did, sir. Who'd ever have thought o' meeting you 'ere ?"

He held out a large and not over-clean hand, which Colin shook heartily.

"I was just saying to meself only yesterday," continued Joe, "some time when I get a free mornin' I must do a trip up to the 'orspital an' tell the doctor abaht my bit o' good luck."

"What's that ?" demanded Colin, taking a seat beside him on the bench. "Have you fallen in love, or is somebody offering you a job at a brewery ?"

"You'd never guess," returned Joe with a chuckle, "not if you was to try for a month o' Sundays." He removed a short clay pipe from the corner of his mouth and spat contentedly on to the platform. "I gorn back into the perfession, guv'nor, that's wot I done."

Colin eyed him incredulously. "That's a good one, Joe," he observed. "Who are you going to fight—Jack Dempsey ?"

"'Taint a joke, guv'nor. I'm back in the old business again, gospel truth I am, but not as wot you might call a principal." He paused, as though to give full weight to his coming disclosure. "You've 'eard tell o' Solly Moss and the Palace o' Sport ?"

"What, the new boxing ring in Whitechapel ?"

"That's it—that's the place I'm gettin' at. Well, the very day after I see'd you and the young lady ahtside the club, who should I run across in the

street but old Solly Moss 'isself. 'Im an' me was pals once, before 'e come up in the world, an' 'e's got a good 'eart, Solly 'as—especially for a Sheeny. We 'as a bit of a talk like, an' a couple o' drinks, an' he says to me ' Joe,' 'e says, ' you come along dahn to my 'all, an' damn me if I don't find you a job.' An' wot's more, 'e's done it, guv'nor. I'm caretaker, chucker-aht, and one o' the two official seconds, with thirty bob a week an' me name on the programme."

" I congratulate you," said Colin. " It must be an interesting job, but it sounds to me as if it was a bit underpaid."

" There's pickin's," returned Joe, with a wink. " A good second can do a lot towards pullin' for a fight, an' it gen'rally means arf a dollar when you 'appen to be in the winnin' corner. Besides "—he licked his lips—" me bein' in wot you might call an official position, folks as is interested in the game likes to make 'emselves civil. Why, this 'ere job will be worth quarts an' quarts o' beer to me every week."

As he spoke the train steamed into the station, and with a simultaneous movement both of them rose to their feet.

" Where are you off to ? " asked Colin. " I get out at Shadwell."

" That's my mark, too," replied Joe. " I gotter go an' see the bloke wot supplies us with our jellied eels. They ain't bin up to standard lately, an' old

Solly, 'e's arsked me to call rahnd and tell 'em wot 'e can do with 'em."

They took their seats, along with the rest of the passengers, and a few minutes more brought them to the equally grimy platform which serves to connect Shadwell with the outside world.

As they mounted the long flight of steps up to the street Colin again addressed his companion.

"It's no use your coming to the hospital now, Joe," he said. "I've left there for good."

"Started one of your own, sir?" inquired Joe innocently.

"Not yet," replied Colin. "I am what you might call marking time at the moment, but I expect I shall be settling down again soon, and when I do I'll let you know my address. However, I shall probably see you again before then. I am sure to be down here a good deal with my friend Dr. Ashton, and one afternoon I'll walk over to your place and see if there's anything doing. I'd like to have the gloves on again, just for a bit of practice."

"You come along, guv'nor," returned Joe with enthusiasm. "There's gen'rally one or two useful lads messin' arahnd, and we'll fix you up with some bloke who can take a decent punch."

They surrendered their tickets to the porter on duty, and, having passed through the doorway, Colin stopped for a moment on the pavement outside to light himself a cigarette.

He was in the act of throwing away the match

when he happened to glance across the street. As he did so he caught sight of two men who were standing in the doorway of a small public house opposite. To an ordinary observer there was nothing particularly striking about their appearance, except for the fact that one of them was unusually well dressed. If they had been Indians in full war-paint, however, the effect upon Colin could hardly have been more remarkable. He remained stock still, his eyes riveted upon the taller of the pair. Although the latter's face was half turned away, there could be no possible mistake. It was Fenton himself, the very man of all others who chiefly occupied his thoughts.

"Anything wrong, guv'nor?" inquired Joe curiously.

The sound of his companion's voice restored Colin's faculties at once. With a quick movement he caught hold of the other's arm, and, drawing him along the pavement for a few paces, pulled up behind the shelter of a deserted cart.

"Joe," he said, "you see those two fellows over there in the door of the pub?"

Mr. Moss's lieutenant squinted furtively round the backboard.

"Wot abaht 'em?" he demanded.

"Have you any idea who either of them is?"

"Dunno the torf," was the answer. "T'other one's a bloke they call 'Spike' Cooper."

"Is he a friend of yours?"

Joe laughed derisively. "Not much. I ain't pertic'ler, but I likes to draw the line somewhere."

"Oh, he's a bad lot, eh?"

"That's as it may be," replied Joe cautiously. "I ain't sayin' nothing, not one way nor the other, but any'ow, I don't fancy 'is comp'ny."

From the security of his retreat Colin subjected "Spike" Cooper to a critical examination. He was a tough-looking customer with broad, powerful shoulders and a lean, mahogany-coloured face. In spite of his somewhat shabby clothes he was evidently on familiar terms with Fenton, for he lounged back against the wall with his hands in his pockets and a half-smoked cigarette hanging from the corner of his lips.

Colin turned to Joe. "Where did you come across him?" he asked.

The ex-pugilist wrinkled his forehead. "Well, I can't say to rights. I think it was the 'Blue Boar' at Shoreditch. 'E's bin 'angin' arahnd these pubs for the last two months, though where 'e come from afore that Gawd knows. Some kind of a Yank I reckon, judgin' by 'is talk."

Colin took another long and deliberate stare at the oddly assorted couple.

"Joe," he said, "will you do something for me?"

"You ain't no call to ask that," returned Joe a little reproachfully.

"I want to know all I can about that chap. I

want you to follow him round and find out who his pals are and where he's living. Do you think you could manage it without giving away the show ?"

Joe's eyes brightened. "That's orl right, guv'nor," he replied encouragingly. "Jest you push orf an' leave the job to me. I'll pick up 'is tracks now, after this 'ere cabinet council's over. There ain't no 'urry abaht them there jellied eels."

"You're a brick, Joe," said Colin gratefully. "If you do happen to find out anything you might call round at Dr. Ashton's. You know his house in the High Street ?"

Joe nodded.

"If I'm not there you've only got to leave a message that you want to see me and I'll be over at the Palace as soon as I get it." He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a couple of one pound notes. "Better take these," he added. "You might want to do a little bribery and corruption."

Joe accepted the money and slipped it inside his belt.

"You leave it to me, guv'nor," he whispered, "and don't you start worryin' if you don't 'ear nothin' fur a day or two. 'E's the sorter cove that's got to be 'andled cunnin', but I'll run 'im dahn right enough afore I done with 'im. I'll stick to 'im like 'is shadder."

As he spoke the two men opposite moved forward out of the shelter of the door. They stood

for a moment on the edge of the pavement, exchanging a few final remarks, and then, with a curt nod to his companion, Fenton stepped into the roadway, and began to cross the street in the direction of the station.

Keeping well behind the cart, Colin waited until he was safely in the booking-office.

"We seem to be in luck, Joe," he observed cheerfully. "The pubs are shut, so if our pal's got a home he's probably on his way there now."

He nodded towards the retreating figure of Mr. "Spike" Cooper, who with his hands still in his pockets was sauntering away casually up the street.

"It ain't unlikely," returned Joe, with an appreciative grin. "Any'ow, we'll 'ave a nice little walk rahnd the 'ouses, an' if we don't do nothing else, we'll get 'old of a decent thirst."

He knocked out his pipe, and, thrusting it into his pocket, drifted off inconspicuously amongst the stream of passers-by.

The whole thing had happened so quickly that up till then Colin's chief feeling had been one of complete surprise. Left to himself, however, the real significance of Fenton's appearance in this out-of-the-way neighbourhood suddenly came home to him with convincing force. Shadwell was about the last part of London that such a man would be likely to patronise unless he had some extremely definite reason for undertaking the journey. Only one reason suggested itself to Colin, namely the

presence of Nancy at Mark's house. That was certainly sufficient to account for the Major's visit, though why he should be standing in the door of an adjacent pub, talking to an obvious ruffian like Mr. "Spike" Cooper, was another problem to which no immediate answer seemed to be forthcoming.

Pondering over this point as he walked towards the surgery, Colin felt exceedingly thankful that he had had the happy inspiration to dispatch Joe in pursuit of the stranger. If some underhand business were going on in connection with Nancy, it would be just as well to make certain whether this sinister-looking individual had anything to do with the proceedings. Of course, it was quite possible that the two men had met merely by chance. Being mixed up with the Turf, Fenton no doubt possessed a number of undesirable acquaintances, and he might have stumbled across one of them accidentally just as he was about to enter the station. That indeed seemed to be the most likely explanation, but, even so, any information that Joe could pick up would certainly not be wasted. If it served no other purpose, it would probably assist in opening Nancy's eyes to Fenton's true character, and for the moment, at all events, that was the principal object which Colin had in his mind.

On reaching the front gate of the surgery, he found its owner standing on the doorstep, in the act of bidding good-bye to a patient. Almost

simultaneously the latter took his departure, and with a hail of welcome Mark stepped forward to greet him.

"The very lad I wanted," was his opening remark. "In fact, I was just going to ring up the hotel and see if I could get hold of you."

"I knew you were keen to hear about the inquest," replied Colin, "and being a gentleman of leisure, I thought I might as well oblige you."

Mark drew him into the house, and relieved him of his hat and stick.

"Come along upstairs," he whispered. "Nancy's doing the books, and there are half a dozen blighters in the waiting-room, but I must hear what's happened, even if it ruins the business."

He led the way to the study, where they found Nancy seated at a roll-top desk, with a couple of formidable ledgers spread open in front of her. She glanced up at their entrance, and then, laying down her pen, swung round smilingly in her chair.

"You must tear yourself away from work for a minute or two," said Mark. "Colin has come to report progress."

He dropped down on the sofa, and, pulling out his pipe, began hastily stuffing it with tobacco.

"Fire ahead," he continued. "Let's have the whole story. I'm dying to hear what's happened, and it will just give me time for a comfortable smoke."

"I'm going to shake hands with Nancy first," said Colin.

He crossed the room, and, having performed the operation, very deliberately seated himself beside her on top of the padded brass fire-guard.

From this position he proceeded to give them a brief but lucid sketch of what had taken place at the inquest. He described the evidence of the various witnesses, the summing-up of the Coroner, and the final and unsatisfying verdict of the jury, concluding with a short account of how he had met Mr. Medwin and the Inspector after it was over and the views which they had expressed with regard to the situation.

"So, you see, we are more or less at a stop for the moment," he finished. "The police aren't likely to do much until they find the Professor's old servant or get an answer to their cable, and as for Medwin—well, I don't believe he cares the least whether the murderer's discovered or not. The money is what he's interested in, and both Marsden and I have got a notion that he's playing some low-down game of his own."

"What sort of game?" inquired Nancy, who had been listening to the whole narrative with absorbed interest.

"We don't know, but Marsden thinks he may have some idea who the rightful heir is, and that he's lying low until he sees the chance of pulling off a fat commission."

Nancy opened her eyes in astonishment. "Surely he wouldn't be so dishonest!" she exclaimed.

"I hope not," replied Colin; "but, after all, he's a lawyer."

Mark hoisted himself up in his chair. "I protest," he said. "I am not going to have Nancy's ingenuous mind corrupted by any beastly cynicism." He turned to Colin. "And how about you?" he added more seriously. "This infernal business must have played the mischief with all your plans."

"Oh, I'm just marking time," said Colin. "I mean to see this thing through before I attempt to do anything else."

Mark nodded approvingly. "That's right," he remarked. "That's your job plain enough." He glanced at Nancy. "I'm afraid our idea won't work," he added.

"Is it a secret?" demanded Colin.

"Well, as a matter of fact I was going to ask you whether you could do us a good turn. If you're busy, however——"

"I should have to be devilish busy to let *you* down," said Colin. "What's the trouble?"

"It's Mary's mother," was the answer. "There's been some unexpected development in the case, and they have got to operate the day after to-morrow. Mary is desperately anxious for me to go up, and I can't possibly get away unless I can find someone to look after the practice. I thought that you might be able to manage it, but——"

"'But' be blowed," interrupted Colin. "I only want to be around in case Marsden needs me, and I shall be quite as handy here as at the Palace Hotel. How long do you expect to be away?"

"I don't suppose I shall be more than a couple of days. It just depends whether the operation is a success."

"Well, consider that settled," said Colin. "It won't interfere with my plans in the least; in fact, I shall be only too glad to have something else to think about."

Mark got up from the sofa, and, crossing the rug, held out his hand.

"Put it there, my son," he said gratefully. "You're a good pal, and the family thanks you."

Colin laughed. "You'd better wait till you come back," he replied. "You'll probably find that I've cured half your patients."

"I don't care a hang about what you do with them," said Mark callously. He turned towards Nancy. "I shall leave you in charge of each other," he added. "You must keep Colin posted in his job, and he must look after you and try to make himself agreeable." He paused, and added chaffingly, "I don't know whether Major Fenton will approve of the arrangement, but I'm afraid we've hardly time to consult him."

There was a brief but pregnant silence.

"Major Fenton?" repeated Colin blankly.

Mark chuckled. "You've met him, haven't you? A kind of adopted uncle of Nancy's. He rolled up here quite unexpectedly about half-past twelve this morning. I suppose he really came to see whether the place was respectable or not, and on the whole I think we managed to set his mind at rest. Anyhow, he made himself extremely pleasant, so of course I asked him to stop to lunch."

Colin flashed a quick glance at Nancy, who was looking distinctly uncomfortable.

"Oh," he said, "that explains things. I thought I caught sight of him in the street just as I was leaving the station."

"He appears to take a great interest in Nancy," pursued Mark, with a mischievous smile, "but somehow or other she doesn't exactly seem to appreciate it."

"I didn't invite him here," protested Nancy, "and I don't think he had any right to come."

Before Mark could reply there was a tap outside, and the harassed features of Martha Jane intruded themselves round the door.

"If you please, doctor," she said, "there's another four patients in the waiting-room. That makes nine altogether."

"Oh, damn!" said Mark. "I suppose I must go down and see them. You'll stay to tea, Colin, of course?"

"If I'm not in the way," was the answer. "Perhaps I'd better go out for a stroll and come back."

"You stop here and talk to Nancy," replied Mark. "There's no hurry about the books, and she can save me a lot of trouble by explaining how we run the practice. She really knows rather more about it than I do."

He knocked out his pipe, and, thrusting it into his pocket, hurried off downstairs on the heels of Martha Jane.

Colin closed the door and came back to where Nancy was sitting.

"So Fenton's sense of duty is still in good working order," he observed.

With a little impatient gesture Nancy brushed aside a stray curl.

"I was very annoyed at his coming down here," she said. "If I'd thought for a moment that he was going to do a thing like that I shouldn't have given him my address."

Colin took up his old position on the fire-guard and looked thoughtfully into her indignant blue eyes.

"What did he want, Nancy?" he asked.

"Oh, it was only to invite me to dine and go to a theatre with him on Wednesday. Of course, he could just as well have written to me or rung me up on the telephone."

"And did you accept?"

Nancy shrugged her shoulders. "I couldn't very well help it. He asked me while we were at lunch, and I didn't like to say I was engaged, because Dr. Ashton would have known it was untrue."

"Otherwise you would have refused him ?"

Nancy nodded. "It may seem ungrateful, but as a matter of fact I don't want to see Major Fenton again. I never liked him very much, and the last time I was with him he——" She hesitated. "Oh, well, he was different in a way, and, to put it quite plainly, I liked him even less. Besides, I haven't forgotten the horrid things he said about you."

Colin searched in his pocket and pulled out the report which Marsden had given him.

"That makes my job a bit easier," he remarked.

She gazed curiously at the slip of paper.

"What's that ?" she demanded.

Colin sat back, still holding it in his hand.

"I've been doing a quite unpardonable sort of thing, Nancy," he said. "Before I tell you, will you promise to forgive me ?"

"Certainly," she said, smiling. "I can always forgive anything that's really unpardonable. It makes one feel so nice and generous."

Without waiting for further encouragement Colin plunged at once into a full description of how he had taken advantage of the Inspector's half-joking offer to make some inquiries with regard to Fenton's character and reputation. He told the whole story quite simply, allowing his own motives in the matter to be taken for granted, and ended by reading her the report.

Nancy, who had listened to him gravely, made no comment until he had finished.

Then with a quaint and rather rueful little laugh she looked up into his face.

"It's a disappointing world, isn't it?" she said. "I did honestly believe that there was something kind and unselfish about his original intentions." She paused. "And you say you saw him in the street? Why, he must have left here over an hour ago."

"I saw him all right," repeated Colin.

He went on to describe his meeting with Joe and the interesting events which had ensued on their arrival at Shadwell station.

"I may be prejudiced," he concluded, "but I'm beginning to think that he's an even bigger scoundrel than the police give him credit for. Anyhow, it's perfectly plain that he's been lying to you from start to finish."

"But why should he?" objected Nancy.

It was Colin's turn to hesitate. "Well, after all, you're rather pretty, you know," he said lamely.

Nancy laughed again. "I've no doubt you're right," she said, "but I don't see that it solves the difficulty. He couldn't have known what I was like when he came and hunted me out."

"No, that's true," admitted Colin. He got off his seat and paced slowly up and down the room. "There's something behind all this, Nancy," he

added ; " some infernal mystery that we don't understand."

" There is," agreed Nancy ; " but I mean to understand it, and very soon too."

Colin stopped. " You're not thinking of keeping that appointment ? "

She nodded. " Of course I'm going to keep it. If I don't, how can I find out what he wants ? " She rose from her chair and came forward to where Colin was standing. " I—I'm awfully grateful for what you've done," she said shyly, " and I can't tell you what a comfort it is to know that I've got someone who's ready to help me." She paused. " All the same," she added, " I'm not in the least frightened of Major Fenton. I've had a lot of practice in looking after myself."

## CHAPTER VII

WITH an inward sigh of relief Colin opened the door of the surgery, and beckoned to the solitary old woman who was still sitting grimly in the corner of the waiting-room. She was the thirty-fourth patient he had interviewed that morning, and the prospect of a well-earned lunch with Nancy was beginning to dangle pleasantly in front of his exhausted spirits.

The old woman entered the surgery, and, after placing a bulky string bag upon his consulting-table, deposited herself in an arm-chair alongside.

Colin took his own seat and smiled at her encouragingly.

"Well, mother," he said, "what's the matter?"

The patient folded her hands. "I've bin pizened," she said. "That's wot's the matter with me, young man. I've bin pizened."

Colin sat back and nodded gravely. "When did this happen?" he inquired.

"Ha!" said the lady, rather bitterly. "That's the very pint I'm comin' to. Are you a pertickler friend o' Dr. Hashton's?"

"I am," said Colin. "That's why I'm taking his practice."

"In that case," continued the visitor, "I don't

mind telling you, young man, that it was 'im as done it."

"What, poisoned you?" exclaimed Colin. "Surely not."

The lady reached for her bag, and, after fumbling among its contents, produced a half empty bottle of medicine. She handed this to Colin, who examined the label.

"Are you Mrs. Jones?" he inquired.

"That's right, young man," was the answer. "Mrs. Jones o' Baxter's Rents, and there ain't no one in Shadwell wot can say to the contrary."

"And why do you think that Dr. Ashton has poisoned you?"

Mrs. Jones leaned forward mysteriously and tapped the bottle.

"You can see for yerself, young man. 'E's given me the wrong medicine. Mind you, I don't say that 'e done it a purpose. I expect 'e was a bit 'urried and made a mistake. All the same, there ain't no gettin' away from it. 'E's given me the wrong medicine, an' I'm pizened."

Colin extracted the cork and took a sniff at the contents.

"It seems all right to me," he observed.

"There's nothing wrong with the smell," admitted Mrs. Jones. "It's the colour wot I'm speakin' about."

"What's the matter with the colour?" demanded Colin. "Some of the best medicines are red."

"Not mine," returned Mrs. Jones doggedly. "My medicine's yeller, always 'as bin. The moment I set me eyes on that bottle I says to meself, ''E's made a mistake.'"

"Then why on earth did you take it?"

Mrs. Jones looked a trifle surprised. "Well, young man, I'd paid ninepence for it, an', not knowin' then as it was pizen, I didn't see no reason for wastin' the money."

"And you say it made you ill?"

"It's only through the mercy o' Gawd that I'm sittin' 'ere now," said Mrs. Jones impressively. "D'rec'ly the third dose passed me lips I come over queer."

Colin poured out a little of the medicine into a glass and tasted it judiciously.

"I don't think you've any reason to be anxious, Mrs. Jones," he said. "Dr. Ashton was only trying you with a new prescription. It's a very good one indeed, but I suppose it doesn't quite suit your constitution."

Mrs. Jones looked round and lowered her voice. "If that's the case," she demanded, "why 'as 'e run away?"

"He hasn't run away," said Colin. "He's coming back to-morrow or the next day. He's only gone up North to look after his wife's mother."

There was a pause.

"Well," said Mrs. Jones doubtfully, "I 'as my own opinions on that point, but seein' as 'ow you're

a friend of 'is I don't blame you for standin' up for 'im. Besides, between you an' me, young man, I wouldn't get Dr. Hashton into trouble, not on no account. We all make mistakes at times, even the best of us. You give me a bottle o' the yeller medicine, the same as I always 'as, an' I shan't say no more about it."

"Right you are," said Colin. He rose from his chair, and, crossing to the cupboard where Mark kept two or three innocuous and highly coloured mixtures ready made up, filled a bottle with the desired specific.

Mrs. Jones inspected it with approval.

"I'm much obliged to you, young man," she observed. "Hall's well that hends well, as the sayin' is. You can tell the doctor from me that 'e won't 'ear no more o' this, so 'e can come back 'ome just as soon as ever 'e likes."

She tucked away the bottle in her bag and made her exit through the side door, which Colin had stepped forward to open for her. As she passed out Martha Jane appeared in the passage.

"Are you ready for lunch, sir?" she inquired.

"I'm more than ready," said Colin. "I'm positively aching for it."

Martha Jane nodded sympathetically. "It must be 'ard work for a young gentleman like you, sir, 'avin' to sit there and listen to all them diseases. You go along into the dinin'-room and I'll run up and tell Miss Nancy. I shan't keep you waitin' more than a couple o' minutes."

Colin returned to his desk, and, having completed his report, with a brief entry on the subject of Mrs. Jones, made his way out into the hall, where he encountered Nancy in the act of descending the staircase.

" I'll be with you in a second," he said. " I'm just going to remove the germs."

He hurried across to the cloak-room, and, after changing his coat and indulging in a welcome bout with a basin of hot water, emerged again in a hungry but contented humour.

Nancy was already seated at the table, looking disturbingly pretty in her severe and business-like costume. Although, on his arrival at the surgery, they had spent a crowded quarter of an hour together, opening the post and discussing the day's work, this was the first opportunity they had had for anything like a private conversation.

" Well," she inquired cheerfully, " how have you been getting on this morning ? "

Colin sank into the vacant chair and stretched out his hand towards the whisky.

" I'm still alive," he said, " but that's about all. Every day, in every respect, my admiration for Mark grows deeper and deeper."

Nancy pushed across the soda. " I often wonder he hasn't broken down," she said. " It's only sheer good nature and kindness that keep him going. He comes in to lunch every day and says the most

blood-curdling things about the patients, but in his heart he just loves them all."

"I know he does," returned Colin, "and I've been trying to copy his example. It's thirsty work, though, when you come to people like Mrs. Jones." He took a long drink and set down the tumbler. "By the way, is there any news from him?"

"Not yet," said Nancy. "The operation was to be at ten o'clock, and he promised to wire directly he knew the result. We shall probably get a telegram this afternoon."

Colin attacked the roast chicken, which Martha Jane had cooked to perfection, and passed over a generous helping.

"And what about last night?" he inquired. "I had no time to ask you anything this morning, but I'm longing to hear how Fenton behaved himself."

"Well, to begin with," said Nancy, "he asked me to marry him."

Colin paused in the act of dissecting a wing.

"Did he, by Jove! I hope you told him to go to blazes?"

"Something rather similar," said Nancy, "only I tried to put it as nicely as possible."

"And how did he take it?"

Nancy paused. "It may sound conceited," she replied, "but I should say he was more angry and disappointed than anyone I ever saw in my life."

"I can quite believe it," said Colin. "You're just the sort of girl who'd make a man feel like that."

She shook her head. "I'm not trying to be modest, Colin. I know I'm pretty—even other women have told me so—but I assure you my looks have got nothing to do with the matter. Do you suppose that a girl doesn't know when a man is really in love with her? Major Fenton doesn't care that for me." She snapped her fingers.

"I shouldn't wonder if you're right," agreed Colin. "A chap with a face like that could hardly have much capacity for romance. I should say that champagne was more in his line."

"All the same," said Nancy, "he's quite serious about wanting to marry me, and, what's more, he's made up his mind that he's going to do it."

"How do you mean?" inquired Colin. "Did e turn nasty when you told him it was a wash-out?"

"Very nasty," said Nancy calmly. "He accused me of all sorts of things, my chief crime being that I've allowed myself to be influenced by you."

"Well, I don't want to brag," admitted Colin modestly, "but I've certainly done my best. Does he know that I'm taking Mark's practice?"

She nodded. "Yes, I'd told him at the beginning of dinner. I suppose that was what put the idea into his head." She stopped. "Colin," she said, "don't think me stupid and melodramatic, but do you know, I am really rather frightened. There was something in the way he spoke about you, something that made me feel as if—oh, I know it sounds ridiculous—but as if you were in actual danger."

Colin sat back and smiled contentedly. "This is too good to be true," he observed. "I've been longing to punch his head ever since he told you that lie about my leaving the hospital."

"But you don't understand," persisted Nancy. "He wouldn't try anything himself, of course; he's much more likely to pay someone else to do it. You go about alone all over the place, and in a rough neighbourhood like Shadwell——"

"You needn't be anxious," interrupted Colin. "I shall keep my eyes open, I promise you. If Fenton's got hold of the idea that I'm in his way, I can quite believe he'll stick at nothing." He paused. "What beats me altogether," he added, "is why he wants to make you his wife. You haven't the least doubt that he's really in earnest?"

"Not the least. He even went so far as talking about a special licence, and suggesting that we should be married this week."

"That makes it fishier still," said Colin, frowning. He stared thoughtfully at his plate for a moment or two, and then suddenly pushed back his chair. "I know what I shall do," he continued. "I shall tell Marsden the whole story and ask him for his advice. I'm perfectly certain there's some damned crooked business at the back of it."

"But you can't possibly bother the police," objected Nancy. "After all, Major Fenton has only asked me to marry him, and there's nothing very criminal in that."

"Depends what you call criminal, said Colin. "I should say he deserved ten years for his confounded cheek."

As he spoke the door opened and Martha Jane inserted her head.

"Would you like any sweet?" she inquired. "There's a nice plum tart in the kitchen if either of you fancy a bit."

Colin glanced at his watch.

"It sounds alluring," he said, "but I don't think I can spare the time. I must start out on my round at half-past, and I shall have to run through the cases first and see what I've got to take with me."

He rose from his chair, Nancy following his example.

Martha Jane looked at them both with disapproval.

"You're as bad as the doctor, every bit," she observed. "'Ow do you expect to keep well if you don't feed proper? What with this here snatching and picking it's a wonder to me that you ain't all in your graves."

"You might give us an extra good tea to make up for it," suggested Colin.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you," said Nancy. "I'm afraid I shall be out when you get back. I've promised to go round and see old Mrs. Merivale, one of Mark's patients."

"Oh!"

Colin's face fell. "That's a blow," he said sadly.

" I can never enjoy my tea properly unless someone pours it out for me."

" I dare say Martha Jane will do it if you ask her nicely," said Nancy. " In any case, I'll try and get back in time for the second cup."

With an encouraging smile she passed out into the hall, and, having paused to light himself a cigarette, Colin returned to the surgery.

Half an hour later, with Mark's black bag in one hand and a stout stick in the other, he set forth into the chill and uninviting atmosphere of the December afternoon. He was not disturbed by Nancy's vague alarm with regard to his personal safety, but his practice took him into a pretty rough neighbourhood, and a good tough ash seemed to him a distinctly suitable companion.

As it turned out, however, the precaution was an unnecessary one. During his long ramble through the lowest parts of Shadwell he met with nothing but good-natured civility. Wherever he went, down sordid alleys and up rickety staircases, a friendly welcome invariably awaited him. His experience at the hospital had given him the knack of getting on readily with poor people, and, since he had done the same round on the previous day, he was already on familiar terms with most of his patients.

By the time he returned to the surgery it was close on five o'clock. Darkness was rapidly setting in, and the feeling that his out-of-door duty was over

for the day seemed to lend an additional attraction to the warmth and comfort of the brightly lit hall.

As he closed the front door Martha Jane emerged from the kitchen.

"A man came to see you just after you'd gone out, sir," she informed him. "Party of the name of Bates. Said he'd call again."

Colin, who had heard nothing of Joe since they had parted outside the station, received the news with no little interest.

"Did he mention any particular time?" he asked.

"No, sir. He just said 'e'd look round again later."

"Well, let me know at once if he does," he replied. "I'll see him immediately, no matter how many people are waiting."

Martha Jane nodded. "There's a letter and a telegram come for you too, sir. They're over there on the hall-table." She paused. "Per'aps as Miss Nancy's out you'd like your tea in the surgery?"

"Yes, that will be best," said Colin. "You can bring it along in as soon as it's ready."

He divested himself of his coat, and, crossing to the table, picked up the telegram. With eager fingers he slit open the flap and pulled out the contents, and as he expected, it bore the Lincoln postmark.

*Operation a complete success. Shall be home to-morrow about one.—Mark.*

He turned to Martha Jane.

"This is from Dr. Ashton," he said. "Everything has gone off splendidly, and he hopes to be back to-morrow."

"'E would," was the answer. "Wild 'orses wouldn't keep 'im from work, not so long as 'e's got a breath in his body."

Colin laughed, and, taking up the other letter, walked forward into the surgery. A bright fire was burning away cheerfully in the grate, and, having flicked on the electric light, he seated himself at his desk and proceeded to open the envelope.

A single glance at the letter inside showed him that it was from Inspector Marsden.

*Scotland Yard,*
*Thursday, December 12th.*

*Dear Dr. Gray,—You will be interested to hear that we have at last managed to pick up the tracks of William Kennedy, Professor Carter's servant. It seems that he has been very ill, and for the last two months has been living in an out-of-the-way village in Hertfordshire under the care of an old female cousin. The latter, who is apparently unable to read, had heard nothing about the murder, and it was only last night that Kennedy was informed of the facts. I am making arrangements to motor down and interview him to-morrow. I don't suppose I shall be back at the Yard until the evening, but if you would care to look in any time*

*after six I shall be pleased to see you and to let you know the result of my journey.*

*I am,*

*Yours sincerely,*

*James Marsden.*

With considerable satisfaction Colin folded the letter and put it away in his pocket. It was a relief to know that things were moving at last, for, even if Kennedy were unable to throw any direct light on the murder, the information he could supply with regard to the Professor's private life might well be the starting-point for further discoveries.

He was pondering over the possibilities of the situation when Martha Jane arrived with his tea. She had evidently accepted her appointment as Nancy's understudy in a serious spirit, for she not only filled his cup, but stood by with watchful solicitude until she was certain that he was provided with everything that he required.

Just as she was turning to leave the room there came a ring at the bell.

" I wonder if that's our friend Joe Bates," said Colin. " If it is, bring him in at once."

There was an interval of nearly a minute, and then, looking rather flushed and ruffled, Martha Jane reappeared, closing the door behind her.

" It ain't 'im," she announced ; " it's a patient. 'E's waiting outside." She nodded towards the hall.

" Oh, hang it all ! " exclaimed Colin. " This is

my hour off. I'm not going to see any more patients until six. Why on earth didn't you tell him?"

"Tell 'im!" repeated Martha Jane indignantly. "I told 'im right enough."

"And do you mean to say he won't go away?"

"'E just pushed me on one side and sat himself down," was the answer. "'E says 'e means to wait 'ere until you come out."

Colin rose to his feet, and, swiftly crossing the room, threw open the door.

A man who was seated on one of the hall chairs jumped up at his appearance. He was a rough-looking customer of the longshoreman type, with a deep scar on one side of his face and a dirty handkerchief knotted round his neck.

Colin walked up to him.

"What do you mean by forcing your way into the house?" he demanded. "If you want to see me you can go round to the surgery and wait until it's open."

The intruder stood his ground, fumbling awkwardly with his cap.

"No offence, doctor," he muttered. "If I done wrong, I asks yer pardon."

"Well, you heard what I said," returned Colin. "There's the door behind you."

The man still made no attempt to move. "Don't be 'ard, doctor," he said hoarsely. "I want yer to

come along and see a pal o' mine, a poor bloke wot's 'ad a haccident dahn at Truscott's wharf."

Colin shook his head. "I can't manage it now," he said. "I've got to be here at six to see my patients."

"You can be back before then, doctor," persisted the other eagerly. "It's only a step from 'ere—it is."

"I know the place," said Colin. "It will take a good twenty minutes to get there."

"'E ain't on the wharf now," explained the other. "We've carried 'im along to 'is own 'ouse."

"Where's that?" demanded Colin.

The man hesitated. "It's dahn at the bottom o' Flood Lane. One o' them old 'ouses backin' on the river."

Colin recognised the spot from his description—a ruinous and half-deserted slum, most of which had already been demolished. Before he could speak, however, the visitor resumed his petition.

"Come along an' 'ave a look at 'im, guv'nor. We can't find no other doctor, an' 'e's sufferin' somethin' crool."

Colin glanced at his watch. "Oh, very well," he said curtly. "I shan't have time to attend to the man properly, but if I find it's a matter for surgical treatment I'll give you a note to the hospital. Just wait here and I'll be with you in a minute."

He stepped back into the consulting-room, and,

crossing to the opposite door, summoned Martha Jane.

"When Miss Nancy comes in," he said, "you might tell her that I've been called out on an urgent case. I'm only going as far as the bottom of Flood Lane, so I shall be back by six."

He thrust one or two articles which might be needed into his bag, and, hurrying out again into the hall, unhooked his hat and coat.

"What sort of injury is it?" he asked, as the front door closed behind them. "A broken leg or something of that kind?"

His companion, who was slightly ahead of him, pushed open the small iron gate and turned to the left in the direction of the river.

"No," he answered slowly, "'e ain't broke nothing—leastways, not as I knows of. The pain's inside of 'im, so 'e says. Twisted 'is guts, I reckon, from the way 'e's carryin' on."

He relapsed into silence, and, checking his pace a few yards farther on, led the way down a dark and narrow alley.

They emerged on to a desolate strip of waste land, where stray piles of brick and other refuse were dotted about forlornly under the light of a solitary street lamp. Exactly opposite them were the partly demolished remains of a large warehouse, with two crazy and tumble-down houses still standing alongside. Behind these, half a mile wide, ran the dark and sluggish current of the Thames.

Colin's guide pointed across towards the dilapidated dwellings.

"That's the 'ouse," he observed, "the end one o' them two. You want to step careful, doctor ; there's a number o' bad places abaht 'ere."

He set forward again, picking his way deliberately between the heaps of debris and the numerous pools of dirty water which infested the whole district. Colin followed close behind him, and after several minutes of this unpleasant progress they came out on to a muddy and deserted roadway which ran parallel with the river.

Colin glanced back over the route they had come. "A nice open situation," he remarked, "but I should think that the people who lived here were rather apt to break their necks."

"It's an orkard spot to get to in the dark," admitted his companion. "You'll be all right though, doctor. I'll see yer back meself as far as Flood Lane."

He crossed the road and advanced towards the houses, one of which appeared to be uninhabited. A dim light was burning on the ground floor of the second, and, mounting the broken step, he rapped twice on the door with his knuckles.

After some delay it was opened by a gaunt, haggard-looking woman, who held up the candle she was carrying and peered suspiciously into the darkness. She evidently recognised the visitor, for

without inquiring his business she stepped back silently against the wall.

"That's 'is wife," observed the man, turning to Colin. "She's a bit queer in the 'ead, so you won't get nothing out of 'er."

He moved aside to make room for Colin's entrance, and then, closing the door behind them, addressed himself to the woman.

"This is the doctor, missus. You take us along in to see Bill."

With a furtive nod she started off along the passage, at the end of which there was another room facing the front door.

Colin, who had turned to follow her, took a pace forward. It was only one pace, for as his foot touched the ground something soft and heavy came down with a blinding thud on the back of his head. Half stunned by the blow, he pitched forward full length on to the rough and uncarpeted boards, and at the same instant two men sprang forward out of the room, and flung themselves heavily on top of him.

What happened during the next few minutes seemed to belong to the world of nightmare. He had a vague impression of fighting desperately with fists and teeth and feet; than a savage hand gripped his by the throat, and everything was wiped out in a sudden and suffocating blackness.

* * * * *

"I tell yer I knows 'im. It's the swine that

was 'elpin' the cops when they pulled 'Ginger Dick.'"

The hoarse voice, which sounded very far away, penetrated slowly into Colin's mind, and, opening his eyes, he stared up at the speaker.

He was still in the passage, stretched out flat on his back, with his ankles tied together and his arms bound tightly to his sides. Three men were standing round him, and, in spite of the dim light and the almost stupefying pain in his head, he had no difficulty in recognising them. The bloodstained face that was scowling at him had been engraved on his memory ever since the day when he first met Nancy. It belonged to the ruffian who had led the attack on Marsden and had kicked him in the ribs when he was lying helpless on the ground. The other two were the plausible visitor to the surgery and Mr. "Spike" Cooper.

It was the latter who replied to the first man's outburst.

"What's that got to do with it, anyway?" he drawled. "I'm here on business, and it don't matter a cuss to me whether he's your long-lost brother."

"It matters to me though," growled the other. "I 'ad somethin' up against 'im before, an' now 'e's bashed 'alf me faice in with 'is boot. Taike that, yer swine!"

He lifted his foot, but before he could accomplish his genial purpose a violent shove from

" Spike " Cooper sent him staggering against the wall.

" None o' that, you fool ! Didn't you hear what the boss said ? If there's any marks on his body we don't get the money." He turned to the man with the scar, who had watched the fracas with cynical indifference. " No good messing about, Jake. Catch hold of his feet and we'll cart him down straight away."

Suiting the action to the word, the two of them raised him quickly from the floor and carried him forward through the open doorway. With a muttered oath the third accomplice pulled himself together and lurched in after them.

All effective resistance being out of the question Colin made no attempt to struggle or cry out. He felt certain that death was very close at hand, and his whole being was racked with a sick fury as he thought of the easy way in which he had allowed himself to be trapped.

Through his half closed eyes he saw that the room which they had entered was in a state of indescribable filth. The floor was littered with empty bottles and old newspapers, the damp plaster was peeling off the bare walls, and the small window, which apparently looked out on to the river, was thickly coated with grime.

In the left-hand corner the raised flap of a trap-door was just visible in the gloom. His two bearers dropped him unceremoniously on the boards

alongside, and with a curt air of authority " Spike " Cooper jerked his thumb towards the hole.

" You get down first, Jake," he said, " and we'll lower him through."

Jake accepted the order without comment, and, swinging himself into the opening, began slowly disappearing from view down the rungs of a rusty iron ladder.

A moment later there came a muffled voice from below.

" Right you are, mate."

Dragging Colin's feet towards the edge, the other two men jerked him roughly from the ground. The next instant his legs were dangling in space, and with the iron rungs bumping against his back he slid rapidly down into the darkness below.

Just before he reached the bottom he felt himself clutched round the waist by a pair of strong arms. Then he was lifted clear of the ladder, and dumped heavily on to a damp stone floor.

After a brief interval " Spike " Cooper also descended, and, producing an electric torch, switched on the light. Colin saw that they were in a large cellar, the walls of which were dripping with wet slime. Except for the trap-door there appeared to be only one other opening—a heavily barred grating some eight feet from the floor.

Bending down over his prisoner, " Spike " Cooper flashed the light full in his face.

" That was a dandy fight of yours, mister," he

drawled slowly, " and I'm real sorry we got to put you through it."

Colin looked up at him unflinchingly. " You seem to take a long time about committing a murder," he said. " Why don't you finish the job and clear out ? "

The other shook his head. " That's just the trouble," he replied, with a touch of regret in his voice. " In order to suit the party that's arranging this little affair you got to be found drowned—picked out of the Thames. See, mister ? "

Colin glanced round, and in a sudden flash the real meaning of the dripping walls became hideously apparent. With a strong effort he managed to control his voice.

" So that's your plan, is it ? " he said. " I'm to be left here until the cellar's flooded ? "

" Spike " Cooper nodded. " It's a dog's trick," he admitted reluctantly, " but I guess you'll find it as easy a death as any other. Soon as the water's up level with that grating it pours in here like a Niagara." He paused. " What I'm buckin' up against," he continued, " is your having to lie here a couple of hours waiting for the tide. Seems to be kinder cruel, that."

In spite of the grim prospect in front of him, Colin laughed.

" Thank you very much," he replied. " I hope that when you're hanged death will be instantaneous."

They were interrupted by an impatient movement from the other man.

"Come along, Spike," he growled. "Wot the hell's the use o' standin' 'ere jawin' ?"

"I guess you're about right," was Mr. Cooper's philosophical answer.

He bent forward once more, and, having satisfied himself that the cords were properly fastened, turned to follow his companion, who was already half-way up the ladder.

Colin watched them disappear through the opening above, then the trap-door closed down, leaving him in complete darkness.

A moment later he heard a grinding clang as a rusty bolt shot home into its socket.

## CHAPTER VIII

THE study clock chimed out the hour of seven, and laying aside the paper she had been looking at, Nancy got up from her chair and walked to the window. She drew back the blind, and stood there for a minute gazing down at the lighted pavements, where the usual throng of poorly dressed women were drifting to and fro, intent upon their evening shopping. Then with a puzzled and rather anxious expression in her face she turned towards the door, and, descending the staircase, made her way along the passage as far as the kitchen.

She found Martha Jane standing at the sink, peeling potatoes.

"I can't think what can have happened to Dr. Gray, Martha," she said. "I'm really beginning to get worried about him."

"Don't you upset yerself, miss," was the reassuring answer. "'E'll be along safe enough in a minute or two."

"I hope so," said Nancy. "All the same, it seems rather extraordinary. You tell me he said he'd be home by six, and here it is just gone seven."

"You can't pay no 'eed to what doctors say," began Martha Jane. "Not that they ain't as truthful as other gentlemen, but——"

She was interrupted by a ring at the back door bell, and, wiping her hands on her apron, departed to answer the summons. Nancy heard the low rumble of a man's voice, followed almost immediately by the sound of returning footsteps.

"It's the same party that called before, Miss Nancy. A man of the name of Bates. The doctor said he wanted to see 'im special, so I s'spose I'd better ask 'im to wait."

"What, Joe Bates the prize-fighter?" exclaimed Nancy. "Oh, please bring him in at once. He's the very person I should like to have a talk to."

Martha Jane disappeared again into the scullery, and a moment later a burly figure in a cap and muffler followed her diffidently into the light.

Nancy welcomed him with an encouraging smile.

"We have met before, Mr. Bates," she said. "I on't suppose you remember, but it was one night in Whitcomb Street, when I was in the car with Dr. Ashton."

Joe grinned a trifle nervously. "That's right, miss," he observed. "I ain't forgot yer—not me." He pulled off his cap and scratched the back of his closely cropped head. "I got a bit o' noos for the doctor," he continued. "D'you happen to know when 'e's likely to be in, miss?"

"That's the very point we were talking about," replied Nancy. "He went out at half-past five and he left a message that he would be back by six at the latest."

Joe stared at her. " Well, that's a bit queer," he remarked. " 'E ain't the sort to say a thing and then not do it."

" It's queerer than it looks," was Nancy's answer. " Six o'clock is the time at which he sees his outdoor patients. He wouldn't forget that, however busy he was."

" Did 'e tell yer where 'e was goin' to ? "

" He told me," broke in Martha Jane. " Some 'ouse down at the bottom of Flood Lane."

A swift change manifested itself in Joe's face. " Flood Lane ! " he almost shouted. " You're sure 'e said Flood Lane ? "

" Of course I am. I ain't deaf, Mr. Bates."

Joe took no notice of the snub. " Wot made 'im go there ? " he demanded.

" 'E was fetched," replied Martha Jane with some asperity. " Fetched by a party who hadn't no better manners——"

" 'Ere," interrupted Joe, " wot was the bloke like ? You answer me quick."

Martha Jane flushed indignantly, but before her lips could frame a protest she was forestalled by Nancy.

" It's all right, Martha. Mr. Bates is afraid that something may have happened to Dr. Gray, and he wants to help us. That's so, isn't it ? " She turned quickly to Joe, who nodded his head.

" Well," replied Martha Jane, in a slightly

mollified voice, " 'e was just a rough-common-looking man the same as you can see 'anging about the street corners. I'd know 'im anywhere, though, if only by the scar on 'is face."

There was a half-stifled oath from Joe. " Jake 'Udson ! " he cried. " Jake 'Udson it was for a million ! " He clenched his fists and glared savagely at the two women. " Nah ye can see why he ain't come back."

Nancy's heart was beating swiftly, but to all outward appearance she remained perfectly cool.

" Don't waste time," she said. " Tell me what you mean at once. I know that you're a friend of Dr. Gray's, and I know that he asked you to follow a man outside the station."

Joe moistened his lips. " That's it, miss. A bloke of the name o' ' Spike ' Cooper. 'E's 'and an' glove with this 'ere Jake 'Udson, an' there ain't two dirtier blackguards, not in the 'ole o' London."

Nancy's face had gone very white. " Do you know this place—Flood Lane ? " she demanded.

" It's where ' Spike ' Cooper's lodgin'," was the answer. " Leastways, not Flood Lane itself, but dahn in one o' them old 'ouses backin' on the river. I seen 'im go in there twice with me own eyes." He pulled on his cap and half turned towards the door. " I'll get inside some'ow, miss. I'll learn wot they done to the doctor if I got to pull the place down."

Nancy stepped forward. "Wait a minute," she said quickly. "I'm coming with you."

Joe turned and stared at her incredulously. "You comin' with me?" he repeated. "Why, wot'd be the good o' that, miss?"

"I can use a revolver," said Nancy curtly, "and there's one upstairs in the doctor's room. You stop here while I fetch it."

There was something so imperative in her manner that Joe attempted no further argument. Removing his cap again, he seated himself obediently on a chair, and, leaving him and Martha Jane to keep each other company, Nancy hurried from the kitchen.

Going straight to the cloak-room, she slipped on a mackintosh over her indoor costume, and, after rapidly donning a hat, ran up the staircase to the study. From the top drawer of the writing-table she took out a small Service revolver which Mark had once exhibited to her with some pride as the actual implement with which he had formerly waged war against the Flanders rats. There was a box of cartridges alongside, and after filling all six chambers she thrust the weapon into her pocket, and swiftly made her way downstairs again to the kitchen.

Joe, who was still sitting where she had left him, rose up at her entrance. It was Martha Jane, however, who was the first to speak.

"You can't go off like this, Miss Nancy," she

exclaimed. "Let me fetch a policeman to come with you."

Nancy shook her head. "There's no time for that," she replied. "Besides, what can we possibly say to a policeman? If we tried to explain he'd only think we were mad."

"You're right, miss," broke in Joe. "This 'ere's a job wot's got to be done quick, an' the sooner we get on to it the better."

"Come along then," returned Nancy. "I'm ready."

She led the way out through the scullery door, and, pulling open the iron gate, turned to Joe, who had followed closely on her heels.

"You give the orders," she said, "and I'll do whatever you tell me."

The light of the street lamp was shining full upon her face, and Joe paused for a moment to inspect her admiringly.

"You got some sense, you 'ave," he observed, "and guts too."

"I hope so," said Nancy. "Anyhow, I've got the revolver, and that seems to me to be almost as useful."

With a chuckle Joe swung out on to the pavement, and, turning to the left, headed eastwards in the direction of Flood Lane.

"It's this way, miss," he continued, after a short pause. "Seein' as 'ow we're workin' in the dark in a manner o' speakin', it ain't no use makin' plans, n

we reach the 'ouse. The first thing we gotter do to get inside. It don't sound like an easy job, but then, yer never knows."

"How many of them do you think there are?" asked Nancy.

"I bin watchin' the place for two days, an' I ain't seen no one except 'Spike' Cooper an' this 'ere Jake 'Udson. I reckon I can 'andle them easy enough so long as they don't start usin' their knives. If they does—well, that's where that gun 'o yourn may come in 'andy."

"Shall I give it to you?" suggested Nancy.

Joe shook his head. "No," he replied. "I likes to 'ave me 'ands free. You stick to it, miss, but don't you begin pluggin' 'oles in 'em, not unless I tips you the orfice. We don't want no inquests, not if we can get 'old of the doctor withaht."

They turned into Flood Lane, and, passing rapidly down that narrow and evil-smelling thoroughfare, emerged on to the broad stretch of waste land that bordered the river bank.

"That's where we gotter go to," said Joe, pointing across to the black outline of the warehouse. "There's a way over right enough, but I guess we'd better stick to the road. If anyone 'appens to be looking out they're less likely to see us."

He struck off to the right, and, keeping well under the shadow of the opposite wall, guided Nancy cautiously forward until they reached the muddy road which ran parallel with the river. Crossing

this, he gained the broken pavement on the farther side, and continued his advance until they were within a few yards of the warehouse.

"It's the second 'ouse you come to from 'ere," he whispered. "I bin thinkin' it over, an' if you ain't afraid, miss, it seems to me the best plan's for you to go on a'ead, an' knock at the door. If they sees you alone they may open it, jest to find out wot yer after."

"What shall I say?" inquired Nancy.

"Don't you say nothin'. I'll be 'anging arahnd close be'ind, and before they shuts it again I'll 'ave me foot inside. We'll do the talkin' then."

Nancy nodded, to show that she understood, and, walking on bravely through the gloom, pulled up in front of the suspected dwelling. A glimmer of light in the front room revealed the presence of a dilapidated knocker. She drew in a long breath, which seemed to steady her throbbing heart, and then, stepping forward, gave a couple of sharp raps.

Almost at once she became conscious that someone was inspecting her from inside the window. The scrutiny must have lasted for several seconds, then the face was suddenly withdrawn, and a moment later she could hear the approach of shuffling footsteps.

After another pause the door began to open. It went back slowly until there was a space of about six inches, and through the gap a pair of suspicious eyes peered out at the visitor.

"Well," demanded a croaking voice, "wot d'yer want 'ere?"

Even if Nancy had been prepared with a reply she would have had no time to deliver it. Silently as a tiger Joe leaped forward out of the darkness, and, bringing every ounce of his weight to bear at the right moment, hurled himself against the panel. There was a shrill cry and the sound of a heavy fall as the door crashed inwards, then Nancy found herself clutching the railings and staring at the vague outline of two figures who seemed to be scuffling furiously on the floor of the passage.

She was recalled to action by the voice of Joe.

"I got 'er," he gasped triumphantly. "Come along in, miss, an' shut the door."

Snatching out her revolver, Nancy stepped across the threshold, and with commendable coolness proceeded to carry out his instructions. The task only occupied her a moment, but by the time she had finished Joe was on his feet again, swearing softly to himself and sucking vigorously at his left thumb. "Bit me to the bone, the 'ell-cat," he observed. "And I 'andled 'er gently, too, jest 'cos she 'appened to be a woman." He paused, and, bending forward, listened intently. "Darned if it don't seem as if she was alone in the 'ouse," he added.

Nancy advanced to where he was standing, and in the flickering candle-light which came out through the open door of the room looked down at the prostrate figure on the ground. It was that of a gaunt,

middle-aged woman, clad in a dirty dressing-gown, with dishevelled hair streaming over her face and neck. A rolled-up handkerchief had been thrust into her mouth, and her wrists were tied together by the scarf which had formerly decorated Joe's neck. Out of her bloodshot eyes she glared up malevolently at the pair of them.

Nancy drew back with a shudder. "I hope she isn't much hurt," she faltered.

"'Urt?" repeated Joe indignantly. "It's me wot's 'urt, not 'er. Got 'er teeth in while I was tyin' 'er up an' 'alf gnawed me blinkin' thumb off!" He rummaged in his pocket, and, after a moment's search, produced a stray length of cord.

"What are you going to do?" asked Nancy.

"Tack her feet together and lock 'er in the room," was the answer. "I'm goin' over this 'ouse from top to bottom, an'——"

"Look! Look!" With a horrified expression in her face Nancy was pointing down towards the floor. Joe's eyes followed the direction of her finger, and a sudden oath escaped his lips.

"Blood!" he cried. "An' wet blood, too!"

He stepped into the room, and, snatching up the candlestick from the table, hurried back with it into the passage.

"Do you see?" whispered Nancy. "There's a trail of it—all along up to the door" She put her

hand to her breast and fought back the numbing fear that seemed to be clutching at her heart.

With blazing eyes Joe turned on the prostrate woman.

"You she-devil!" he roared, shaking his fist. "If any 'arm's come to the doctor through you an' your filthy mates, I'll rip the skin off all three of yer."

Before the words had left his lips Nancy was already at the farther door.

"Quick, Joe!" she cried piteously. "Quick! Bring the candle."

In two strides the prize-fighter was beside her. "You stand back," he commanded hoarsely, and, thrusting the candlestick into her hands, gripped hold of the knob.

As the door swung open Nancy raised the light. Its faint gleam flickered round the sordid room, disclosing the damp and peeling wallpaper and litter of empty whisky bottles which lay about the floor.

Joe's glance travelled swiftly from one corner to another. "There's no one 'ere," he muttered. "We'd best try the floor above."

Nancy caught him by the sleeve. "Listen," she cried tensely. "What's that?"

From below came an unmistakable sound—the steady but muffled splash of running water.

For a second they both stood there motionless, then, with a sudden exclamation, Nancy pushed her way past and stumbled blindly forwards towards the trap-door.

"Joe," she gasped, "he's down there! I know it. I feel it." She sank on her knees, and, setting the candle on the floor beside her, began tugging desperately at the iron bolt.

Recovering from his momentary amazement, Joe hurried to her assistance.

"'Ere," he growled, "let me get at it."

He seized hold of the rusty stanchion, and with a vicious jerk wrenched it backwards. Another heave and the heavy flap rose slowly into the air, revealing a black, yawning gap and the top rungs of an iron ladder.

Stretched out at full length on her face, Nancy thrust the candle over the edge. The light gleamed upon a rush and eddy of chocolate-coloured water, and then suddenly a frantic cry broke from her lips.

"Colin! Colin!"

With a violent imprecation Joe pushed her on one side.

"'Old on," he roared down the trap. "I'm comin'."

He swung himself through, and dropping with a loud splash into the swirling waters, scrambled desperately towards the opposite corner, where a man's head and shoulders were just visible in the gloom. Another minute and he would have been too late, for even as he reached the spot a fresh torrent surged in through the opening, and with a choking sob Colin swayed forward and collapsed.

Keeping his own feet with difficulty, Joe clutched

hold of the drowning man and dragged him to the surface. In doing so he made the discovery that Colin's arms were lashed to his sides, and the full nature of the task that confronted him flashed grimly across his mind.

As a veteran boxer, however, the power to think quickly and coolly in moments of danger had practically become an instinct. He realised instantly that there was only one chance of escape for both of them, and that was to cut through the cords before the incoming water rose above their heads.

Swinging his half-conscious companion round, he propped him against the wall. Then, freeing one hand, he dragged out the clasp-knife which he always carried in his pocket, and wrenched open the blade with his teeth.

As he did so, Colin by a great effort managed to force a few words from between his chattering teeth.

"There's another one—round my feet. Cut that too if you can."

"Right you are!" shouted Joe encouragingly. "Keep it up, doctor, and I'll 'ave you loose in a couple o' shakes."

With feverish haste he accomplished the first part of his task, and then, taking a deep breath, plunged his way down through the water until his fingers encountered the second cord. One vicious slash severed the wet strand, and, uncoiling it as rapidly as he could, he struggled back to the surface, puffing and gasping for air.

Quick as he had been, there was scarcely a second to spare. The water was already up to his chin, and Colin, although his legs and arms were now free, was far too numbed and exhausted to make more than the feeblest efforts on his own behalf.

Summoning every ounce of his strength, Joe lifted the latter bodily in his arms. Then with swaying steps he stumbled forward in the direction of the trap-door, where the little yellow flame of the candle which Nancy was holding flickered and gleamed above their heads.

"Get 'old of the ladder, guv'nor," he panted. "Get 'old of it some'ow and I'll shove yer up."

Colin heard, and with blue and stiffened fingers caught desperately at the rungs.

At the same moment he glanced up towards the trap, and there, sharply illuminated in the candle-light, he saw Nancy's face bending down towards him.

With something between a sob and a laugh she stretched out her hand.

"Stop as you are now," came Joe's voice. "I'm goin' to stoop down so as you can get on top of me. All you've gotter do is to keep yerself stiff."

There was a splash, and a second later Colin's ankles were encircled in a powerful grip. Then his feet were resting on Joe's shoulders, and inch by inch he felt himself hoisted upwards, until Nancy's fingers closed tightly round his wrists.

Another heave from below and the upper half of his body was through the trap. He thrust out a hand to steady himself, and as he did so a sudden wave of giddiness overcame him, and he sank sideways into Nancy's arms.

"COLIN, Colin dear! It's all over. You're safe up here with us."

He opened his eyes to find his head resting upon Nancy's shoulder, and the dripping figure of Joe just emerging through the trap. For a moment he made no attempt to move, then, as the truth of the statement became increasingly clear to him, a contented sigh escaped his lips.

Nancy drew him still closer, her soft cheek pressing against his. "Are you much hurt?" she whispered.

Though feeling curiously disinclined for conversation, Colin managed to find his voice.

"I don't think so," he said weakly. "What I really want is a good stiff drink."

Joe, who had stepped out on to the floor and picked up the candle, glanced hastily round the room, then with a sudden exclamation he darted across towards a shelf by the bed.

"'Ere we are!" he cried triumphantly. "'Ere's the very thing!"

He wrenched out the cork from a half-empty bottle of rum, and hurrying back to where Colin was lying, dropped down on one knee alongside of him.

" 'Ave a go at this, doctor," he urged. " Nothing like rum to warm yer up when you're wet through."

He tilted forward the bottle, and, putting his lips to the neck, Colin gulped in a generous mouthful. The raw spirit sent a comforting glow all through his chilled and exhausted body, and with a fresh effort he struggled up into a sitting position.

" Thank you both," he gasped, with the ghost of a smile. " Sorry not to have said it before, but I'm only just beginning to get my bearings." He stared a little dizzily from one to the other of them. " Where are ' Spike ' Cooper and his friends, and how in the name of all that's wonderful did you manage to find your way here ? "

" It was Joe," said Nancy. " He had been watching this house for the last two days, and he had seen them go in and out. When you didn't come back he felt sure you must have been trapped."

" So we just come along to see wot was 'appening," continued Joe, removing his mouth from the bottle. " And lucky we did, too, judgin' by the way things was shapin'."

Colin passed his hand over his forehead. " But how did you get in ? " he asked. " What have you done with the others ? "

" There wasn't no others," explainedJoe. " Only a bitin', scratchin' she-devil." He got up suddenly, and, tiptoeing lightly to the door, peered out into the passage. " Yus," he added, " she's still there."

" It's the old woman who opened the door," explained Nancy. " Joe tied her up and gagged her so that she shouldn't be able to interfere. There doesn't seem to be anyone else in the house."

" Then the quicker we get out of this the better," exclaimed Colin. " They've probably only gone round to the nearest pub, and now the cellar's flooded they may be back any minute."

" It's all right," said Nancy. " I've got Mark's pistol with me."

" You would have," returned Colin admiringly. " All the same, it would be madness not to make a bolt for it while we've got the chance. We shall have plenty of time to talk when we're safe outside." He extended an arm to each of them, and with their joint assistance scrambled painfully to his feet. " You'll have to help me along at first," he added ; " my legs are so cramped I can hardly move a step."

" I was afraid they'd killed you," said Nancy, with a queer little gulp. " There was blood all along the passage."

" Oh, that wasn't mine," returned Colin reassuringly. " That belonged to one of the other gentlemen whom I happened to kick in the face."

" We may as well taike this with us," observed Joe, stuffing the remainder of the rum into his pocket. " Nah, doctor, you 'ang on tight to me, an' don't you worry yerself abaht nothin'. We ain't bein' stopped this journey, not if we runs into the 'ole stinkin' pack of 'em."

He slipped an arm like a steel cable round Colin's waist, and, preceded by Nancy carrying the candle, they staggered out into the corridor.

"Don't you mind treadin' on 'er," continued Joe, as they approached the squirming figure on the floor. "She's one o' them wild cats that it don't pay to be perlite with."

Colin himself was in no mood for superfluous courtesy, but a timely swerve enabled him to avoid the opposite extreme, and the next minute they had hobbled down the steps, and were standing on the pavement.

Blowing out the candle and placing it on the ground, Nancy closed the door behind them.

Joe held out his free hand towards her. "Better let me 'ave the gun, miss," he remarked. "We might meet 'em before we gets to Flood Lane, and, seein' as they means mischief, the only thing to do is to shoot quick."

Nancy handed it over without a word, and, crossing to the railings, took up her position on the farther side of Colin. The latter put his other arm round her shoulder, and in this somewhat huddled formation the three of them started off at a slow pace along the front of the warehouse.

It was a painful journey as far as Colin was concerned, for with every step he took the blood began to circulate more freely through his numbed limbs, causing him such intense agony that at times he could hardly suppress a groan.

In order to take his mind off his sufferings he began to tell them his story, jerking it out in broken and disconnected phrases as they limped their way slowly forward through the darkness. He described how he had been stunned in the passage by a blow from a sandbag, and how, on coming round, he had recognised "Spike" Cooper and the man who had led the attack on Marsden in the King's Road. He went on to give them an account of the way in which he had been thrust down into the cellar and left there to drown, and of how, after what seemed like hours of vain struggling, he had at last succeeded in getting on his feet, just before the water began to pour in through the opening.

"I don't know why I took the trouble," he finished, "except that one doesn't like to go under without a last kick. I never dreamed that there was the faintest chance of my being rescued. When I heard you opening the trap I made certain that it was only Cooper and the others come back to watch me drown."

As he spoke they reached the entrance to Flood Lane, and with a grunt of relief Joe slipped the revolver into his pocket.

"Better not be seen carryin' a gun 'ere," he observed. "There might be a cop at the corner, and I reckon we want to get you back 'ome as soon as possible."

"You needn't worry about me," said Colin encouragingly. "This little stroll has just saved my life."

He was, as a matter of fact, already beginning to walk more easily, and by the time they came out at the top of the lane into the main road he found himself able to dispense with Nancy's assistance.

Even so, with two of the party drenched to the skin, they certainly presented an unusual spectacle. It takes something extremely out-of-the-way, however, to excite much comment in Shadwell High Street, and, except for one or two curious glances which were cast at them as they passed under the street lamps, they managed to reach the surgery without attracting any particular attention.

"I expect I can find you a change, Joe," said Colin, as Nancy pulled out her key. "Dr. Ashton has lots of old clothes kicking about, and I'm sure he won't mind my pinching a suit for you."

Joe shook his head. "It's very good of you, guv'nor, but I won't come in, not if ye don't mind. I gotter be at the Palace by eight o'clock, an' I can get me duds dried there while the boxin's on. They won't be none the worse for a bit o' washin'."

"Oh, but you must, Joe," exclaimed Nancy, in some distress. "You can't go about in those wet things. You'll catch your death of cold."

Joe chuckled hoarsely, and patted the bottle in his side pocket. "Not me, miss," he replied. "I ain't the sort as ketches cold, not when I got 'alf a bottle o' rum on me." He turned to Colin. "You ain't sittin' dahn under this, doctor?" he added. "You let me know when ye feels up to it, and I'll

be round 'ere in a brace o' shakes. We'll smash the guts outer them two for this night's work, or my name ain't Joe Bates."

"I'll fix up something of the sort if I can," said Colin hopefully. "I've got a notion, however, that it's rather a bigger business than it looks, so you mustn't be disappointed if we have to bring the police in."

"Jest as you thinks best, guv'nor," was the regretful answer. "I know yer wouldn't spoil a bit o' sport, not if you 'adn't got some good reason for doin' it."

He raised his hand in a parting salute, and, before either of them could say another word, turned swiftly round and slipped out through the iron gate.

"I hope he'll be all right," said Nancy. "He's terribly wet, poor man, and that wretched woman bit his thumb right down to the bone."

"That won't worry Joe," replied Colin reassuringly. "It takes a motor-bus to knock him out."

He shivered slightly as he spoke, and with a hurried movement Nancy turned the key and pushed open the door.

"Now, Colin," she said, "you're under my orders. The first thing you've got to do is to come straight up and have a hot bath. Then you must get into bed at once, and I'll bring you something to eat."

"Make it bread and milk," said Colin pleadingly. "I've got such a confounded headache, I couldn't face anything more exciting than that."

Taking his arm, Nancy helped him up the staircase to his bedroom, where she lighted the fire and left him to undress. Then, after turning on the bath, and putting everything in readiness, she hastened downstairs to the kitchen.

Martha Jane, bursting with curiosity, greeted her in the doorway.

"I seed you takin' 'im upstairs, miss. However did 'e come to fall in the river?"

"He didn't," said Nancy. "He has been nearly murdered down in one of those old houses by the warehouse. They tied him up in a cellar where the water came in, and left him to drown."

Martha Jane threw up her hands. "Well, I never!" she exclaimed. "And 'im such a pleasant-spoken gentleman, too." She paused to recover her breath. "Who do you reckon done it, miss? Some o' them Bolsheviks?"

"Joe knows who they are," replied Nancy, "and I've no doubt the police will be able to get hold of them. Meanwhile, what we've got to do is to make Dr. Gray some nice hot bread and milk. He's having a bath now, and I'll take it up to him as soon as he's in bed." She glanced at the kitchen clock, and a sudden resolve came into her mind. "I think I'd better stay here myself, Martha," she added. "I can easily sleep in Mrs. Ashton's room,

and then I shall be able to answer the telephone if there are any night calls."

"I shall be thankful to 'ave yer, miss," was the relieved answer. "You never know what may 'appen, and if the doctor was to die in 'is bed I should be that scared I shouldn't know which way to turn."

"Oh, there's no fear of that," replied Nancy, smiling. "You go along and cut up some bread, while I put the milk on."

A quarter of an hour later, carrying a daintily laid tray, she mounted the staircase and tapped at Colin's door.

"Come in," he called out, and, entering the room, she found him sitting up in bed and smoking a cigarette.

"Oh, I'm pretty well all right now, except for my head," he replied cheerfully in answer to her inquiry. "Lucky for me it's a good thick one, or I believe that chap would have fractured my skull."

"I'm not going to let you talk," said Nancy severely. "You've got to eat this and go right off to sleep. I've arranged to stay here to-night so that you won't have to bother about the phone."

"I promise I'll be good," said Colin obediently, "but there are two things I want to speak to you about, and they'll neither of them take long."

Nancy glanced at her watch. "I will stop five minutes," she said, "just while you finish your bread and milk."

She sat down on the edge of the bed and helped herself to a cigarette from the case which he held out to her.

" In the first place, I've got to apologise for being an idiot," he began. " If I'd had the sense to listen to your warning I shouldn't have given you and Joe all this confounded trouble." He dipped his spoon into the basin and looked at her thoughtfully. " Well," he added, after a pause, " what do you think of our friend Major Fenton now ? "

" I think he ought to be shut up in an asylum," said Nancy. " Anyone who tries to commit a murder for such a ridiculous reason as me must be as mad as a hatter."

Colin shook his head. " Fenton isn't mad," he said quietly. " He's just an ordinary blackguard, and rather a clumsy one at that."

Nancy stared at him in bewilderment. " Then why——" she demanded.

" I don't know if you've ever read Boswell," continued Colin, " but Dr. Johnson says that it sharpens a man's wits wonderfully if he's just on the point of being hanged. You can take my word for it that the same thing's true about being drowned. I did a lot of thinking while I was down in that cellar, and I've come to the conclusion that we're up against something much bigger and more complicated than we've got any idea of."

Nancy sat motionless, her blue eyes fixed steadily on his.

"I don't quite understand," she said slowly, "but I somehow feel that you're right."

"I won't try to explain now," replied Colin. "My head's aching too badly for one thing, and in any case I am going to turn the whole business over to Marsden to-morrow, and I would rather wait until I hear what he's got to say about it." He paused. "Besides," he added, "I have only another three minutes, and there's something much more important I want to discuss."

"What's that?" inquired Nancy.

"Come a little closer," said Colin. "It's confidential."

Nancy moved forward obediently, and with a sudden movement Colin pushed aside the tray and took hold of her two hands.

"It's just this," he whispered. "I love you so much that I don't know whether I'm sitting in bed or whether I've died and gone to heaven."

Nancy looked up into his face, a faint smile quivering round the corners of her lips.

"I think you must be in bed, Colin. They don't wear pyjamas in heaven."

He leaned towards her. "Say you care for me, Nancy, even if it isn't true."

She shook her head. "I told you I was no good at pretending. I have loved you shamelessly ever since that first day in the King's Road."

With a deep, contented laugh Colin drew up her hands until they rested on his shoulders. "So have

I," he confessed, " but I only realised it while I was waiting to be drowned. I think I must be the biggest fool in England, but I'm certainly the happiest."

He kissed her lips with a passionate tenderness, and then, slipping his arms round her, held her close to him, his face resting against hers.

For a moment or two they remained quite still then very gently Nancy raised her head.

" I don't know much about concussion, Colin," she said, " but I'm quite sure that this isn't the right treatment for it."

" I haven't got concussion," returned Colin. " What I'm suffering from is an acute form of heart trouble."

Nancy stroked his cheek with her small, cool fingers.

" My poor darling," she whispered. " I will do everything I can for you to-morrow—I promise you that—but I *must* run away now and let you go to sleep. I don't want you to be seriously ill, Colin, especially when you've just found out that you love me."

" Perhaps you're right," admitted Colin reluctantly. " The worst of it is we shall have precious little time to ourselves until Mark comes home, and after that I shall have to dash up to Scotland Yard."

Nancy tucked in the bed-clothes, and then, bending over, dropped a soft little kiss on his forehead.

"Never mind," she said happily. "There'll be lots of days after to-morrow."

She walked to the doorway, and for a moment stood there, looking back at him with a world of love and tenderness in her eyes. Then very softly she stepped out into the passage and closed the door behind her.

* * * *

When Colin woke next morning it was with a vague feeling that something extraordinarily pleasant had happened to him. For several seconds he lay still, wondering what it could be; then, as the truth suddenly occurred to him, he started up from the pillow and opened his eyes. Two agreeable discoveries awaited him. His headache had gone, and Nancy, fully dressed and holding a cup of tea in her hand, was standing beside the bed.

"I was just going to take it away again," she said, smiling. "You looked so beautifully comfy I hadn't the heart to wake you."

Colin reached out an arm and imprisoned her left hand.

"Tell me quick, Nancy," he said. "It *is* true about last night, isn't it? I'm terribly afraid that perhaps I fell asleep and dreamed it all."

She shook her head. "No, Colin," she said. "It's quite true. You sat up in bed and made love to me in the most passionate manner. I don't know whether you really meant it or whether it was because you had had a blow on the head."

Colin leaned forward, and, taking the cup out of her hand, deposited it carefully on the table beside him. Then he drew her gently down on to the bed, and, putting his arms round her, pressed his lips to hers.

"I think you must be better," said Nancy, as soon as she was at liberty to speak.

"I'm not only better," declared Colin, "I'm perfectly well. I believe an occasional smack from a sandbag would do me all the good in the world."

Nancy parted his thick curly hair, and very carefully examined the back of his head.

"You've got a nasty lump there still," she said. "Hadn't you better stop in bed until Mark comes?"

"Good Lord, no!" returned Colin. "I'm going to get up and do my job. There'll be all last night's patients to see as well as to-day's, and I don't want to land Mark with a double dose of work."

"Well, if you really mean it," said Nancy, "I must go downstairs and get things ready. I haven't even opened the letters yet."

"Just one more kiss first," pleaded Colin.

"Only one, then," said Nancy firmly, "and that must be the last until this afternoon. If you don't treat me with proper respect while I'm your secretary I shall report you to the Medical Council."

For a man who during the last twenty-four hours had looked straight into the face of death, and had also discovered that he was deeply in love, it must be admitted that Colin got through the morning's

task with considerable credit. It was no light session either, for, in addition to his ordinary round of visits, he was faced, as he had predicted, by an exceptionally heavy list of callers, several of whom were still indignant over their fruitless vigil on the previous evening. An occasional glimpse of Nancy, however, as she gravely entered the surgery with some necessary reference or address, was sufficient to refresh his energies, and by one-thirty his somewhat exhausting programme was practically complete.

He was, indeed, in the very act of dismissing his last patient when a taxicab drove up to the door, and the sturdy, untidy figure of Mark bundled out on to the pavement. Nancy must have seen him, too, from the study window, for as the front door opened Colin heard her voice in the hall, and the next moment the pair of them entered the surgery.

Mark thrust out his hand and wrung Colin's heartily.

"I needn't ask how everything is," remarked the latter. "You look too damn cheerful for anything but good news."

"That's right," returned Mark, tossing his hat on to a chair. "The operation went off like clockwork, and I left the old lady sitting up in bed having a cup of tea with Mary. She'll be as fit as a fiddle in another fortnight." He stepped forward to the table and glanced casually down at the consulting book. "By Jove, you've had some patients," he

exclaimed. "I hope you haven't been bored stiff."

Nancy's lips twitched, and, as though moved by a similar impulse, Colin suddenly burst into a chuckle of laughter.

"No," he replied dryly, "I can't exactly say I've been bored."

Mark looked questioningly from one to the other of them. "What's the joke?" he demanded.

As he spoke Martha Jane appeared in the doorway. "Lunch is ready," she announced, "if you'd like me to bring it up."

Colin slipped his arm through Mark's. "You shall hear all about it when we've had something to eat," he answered. "I've been healing the sick ever since half-past nine, and I'm beginning to faint for want of nourishment."

"I'll go along to the cellar and get out a bottle of fizz," suggested Mark. "I think you and Nancy are both entitled to a drink."

Once more Colin laughed appreciatively. "Yes," he said, "under the circumstances I suppose we are."

* * * * *

"And now," observed Mark, as he pushed his coffee-cup away half an hour later, "I'd like to know what you two sunny-hearted infants were giggling at when I made that innocent remark in the surgery."

Colin glanced at Nancy. "Shall I tell him?" he asked, "or will you?"

" Oh, you," said Nancy decisively. " The police will want to know all about it, so it's just as well you should have a rehearsal."

" The police ! " exclaimed Mark. " Good heavens, I hope you haven't been sending out prussic acid in mistake for magnesia ? "

" It's worse than that," said Colin cheerfully. " However, if you hang on tight to your chair and don't interrupt I think you may be just able to bear it." He paused. " Joking aside, Mark," he added more seriously, " we seem to have struck something really ugly in the way of trouble, and I want your opinion and advice pretty badly."

At the sudden change in his voice Mark sobered down instantly.

" Well, if you mean that, my son," he said, " get on with it at once."

" It's chiefly about Nancy's guardian," continued Colin. " You remember him, the chap who came to lunch ? "

Mark nodded.

Going back to their first meeting in Jubilee Place, Colin began very carefully and deliberately to relate everything he knew about Major Fenton, of which Mark was still in ignorance. He described how the man had originally forced his society upon Nancy by pretending to have been acquainted with her father, and how, on discovering who Colin was, he had endeavoured to prejudice her mind against him by inventing that absurd story about a scandal at

St. Christopher's Hospital. He went on, step by step, to trace the various developments that had followed—his own inquiries at Scotland Yard, Fenton's abortive proposal to Nancy, his suggestive meeting with "Spike" Cooper outside the public-house, and the improvised engagement of Joe Bates in the rôle of an amateur detective.

Having thus cleared the ground, he proceeded to give a curt account of what had taken place on the previous evening. He spoke very quietly and simply, but the details were dramatic enough in themselves without any word-painting, and it was easy to see the profound amazement with which Mark drank in his story.

So thunderstruck, indeed, did the latter appear to be that nearly a minute must have elapsed after Colin had finished speaking before he attempted to offer his first comment.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he exclaimed. "And they call this a civilised country!"

"Oh, it's civilised enough," returned Colin carelessly. "If I hadn't been able to get some bread and milk and a hot bath when I came back I should probably be down with double pneumonia." He lighted another cigarette and leaned inquiringly across the table. "Those are the facts, anyhow, Mark. And now I'll be much obliged if you'll let me know what you make of 'em."

Mark took off his spectacles and polished them deliberately with his handkerchief.

"There's one thing that's perfectly plain," he said. "The sooner Fenton's in Broadmoor the better for you and Nancy."

"You think he's insane then ?"

Mark received the question with a stare of astonishment. "Insane !" he repeated. "Why, what the devil else can he be ?"

"You have seen him yourself," persisted Colin. "Did you notice anything the least queer about him ?"

Mark paused. "No," he said slowly. "Now you come to mention it, I'm hanged if I did."

"Nor I," was Colin's rejoinder. "I quite agree with you that he ought to be shut up, only I think it's Dartmoor and not Broadmoor."

"But, hang it all," broke in Mark, "a sane man doesn't try to have a perfect stranger murdered just because he's a little sore at being turned down by a girl."

"He doesn't," admitted Colin. "There must be some other reason that we know nothing about, and that's why I'm going to turn the whole thing over to Marsden. If I thought that it was merely a personal matter between him and me I'd go round and knock the stuffing out of him myself."

Mark replaced his spectacles with an air of bewilderment that was almost comic.

"The more one thinks over it," he said, "the more incomprehensible it seems. For one thing, why should he connect you with Nancy at all ? You have only seen each other about three times."

There was a pause.

"Well, as far as that goes," replied Colin, "he may have a better reason than you imagine."

Mark glanced at Nancy, who had turned a delicate shade of pink.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "You don't mean——"

"Yes I do," replied Colin; "we fixed it up last night over the bread and milk, and I'm so happy that I could get up and dance round the room."

He stretched out his arm, and, taking Nancy's hand across the table, bent over and kissed the tips of her fingers.

"Well, if that isn't the limit!" ejaculated Mark bitterly. "I leave my practice in your hands, trusting to your honesty, and when I come back I find you've pinched the one thing I value most—the only perfect secretary a doctor ever had."

Nancy turned towards him with a startled expression. "Oh," she cried remorsefully, "I never knew you'd look at it like that."

Mark got up from his chair, and, stepping towards her with a twinkle in his eyes, laid his hand affectionately on her shoulder.

"My beloved child," he said, "I was only joking. I shall just hate losing you, and so will Mary, but, thank God, we're neither of us quite such selfish pigs as to grudge you the happiness you deserve."

He picked up the champagne bottle and tilted the few remaining drops into his empty glass.

" Colin, my lad," he said, " here's my blessing and my congratulations ! Nancy's a million times too good for you, but——"

As he spoke the telephone bell rang sharply, and Colin, who was sitting nearest the door, jumped to his feet.

" I'll go," he said. " You finish your speech, Mark. It would be a pity to break off just when you're getting really truthful."

He hurried out into the hall and took down the receiver.

" Is that 276 Shadwell ? "

" It is," he answered.

" Inspector Marsden of Scotland Yard speaking. Is Dr. Gray in ? "

" He's not only in, but he's talking to you," returned Colin.

" I thought it was your voice," came the reply. " Look here, doctor, I've got back a bit earlier than I expected, and I want to see you as soon as possible. Can you come up to the Yard straight away ? "

" I can be there in half an hour," said Colin.

" That will do all right. Don't be later if you can help it. I've been let in for an unexpected appointment at four o'clock, and there are several things I'd like to talk to you about first."

" Well, if it comes to that," remarked Colin, " there's something I'm pretty anxious to discuss with you."

" Anything serious ? " rapped out the other.

" Only that somebody tried to murder me last night."

" *Tried to murder you !* Who was it ? "

" Seems to have been a syndicate," was the answer. " The principal parties were two gentlemen called ' Spike ' Cooper and Jake Hudson, both of this parish. The third one was the same cheery sportsman who kicked you in the tummy."

He heard a muttered exclamation at the other end of the telephone.

" You had better not say any more now. Come along up immediately. If this is true it's of the utmost importance."

" Yes," said Colin dryly. " It struck me that way too."

He replaced the receiver, and, turning round, found Mark and Nancy standing in the doorway.

" I have been summoned to Scotland Yard at once," he informed them. " Marsden seems as anxious to see me as I am to see him."

" Perhaps he's got hold of some clue about the murder ? " suggested Mark.

" I shouldn't wonder," said Colin. " I know he went down into the country to look up the Professor's old servant this morning, and he certainly spoke as though things were beginning to move." He turned towards the pegs and started to unhook his hat and coat.

" How are you going to get there ? " inquired Mark.

"Oh, I've brought the car along with me. It's only round the corner at Higgins's place."

"You'll promise to be careful, won't you?" said Nancy rather anxiously. "I hate to let you out of my sight until those three men have been arrested."

"You needn't worry about them," returned Colin with a laugh. "They must have found out by now that they made a bloomer last night, and it's a hundred to one that the whole lot have skedaddled."

"Major Fenton won't have run away," persisted Nancy. "He has no idea that you saw him talking to Cooper, and there's nothing else to connect him with the affair."

"No, that's true," admitted Colin. "He must be feeling as sick as the devil, and probably in a blue funk as well, but the only thing he can do is to sit tight and hope for the best."

"Anyhow, he'll be lying fairly low for the moment," agreed Mark. "You bung along off, my son, and get back as soon as possible. You'll find Nancy and me here, unless we've burst with curiosity."

It was exactly on the stroke of a quarter past three when, with a sharp blast of his horn, Colin shot past the policeman on duty and pulled up neatly in the centre court of Scotland Yard. Before he could attempt to dismount two indignant constables were alongside of him.

"Who are you?" demanded one. "Don't you

know it's against the regulations to bring in a car without permission ? "

" Sorry," said Colin penitently. " The fact is, I've got a very urgent appointment with Inspector Marsden. He telephoned me to be here at a quarter past without fail."

" Well, you take my advice and be a bit more careful the next time," observed his interrogator, " or as likely as not you'll find yourself in trouble." He turned to his companion. " Better take him up at once. The Inspector's in his room."

Climbing out of the car and following his guide, Colin ascended the flight of stone stairs until they reached the same apartment to which Marsden had conducted him before. Having inquired his name, the constable rapped loudly, and in answer to a peremptory invitation pushed open the door and stepped briskly forward.

" Dr. Gray to see you by appointment, sir."

Marsden blotted the letter that he was writing and got up from his desk.

" Come along in, doctor," he called out ; and then, as Colin entered, he pulled forward a chair and motioned the constable to withdraw.

" Take that seat," he added, directly the door was shut. " There's no time to waste, and I want to hear your story before we discuss anything else. Don't hurry, though ; tell it me in your own way, just as you did when you described the murder."

Colin laid his hat on the floor, and, thrusting his hands in his pockets, commenced to speak.

In very much the same words that he had used to Mark he repeated the whole story of Fenton's relations with Nancy and himself, taking the utmost care to omit nothing which might have any conceivable bearing on the case. Then, still in the same methodical and detached fashion, he went on to relate the remainder of his story, while all the time the Inspector sat by in grim silence, his hard blue eyes fixed intently on his companion's face.

" I don't know how it strikes you," observed Colin, when he had quite finished, " but Nancy and I have been chewing it over pretty thoroughly, and we both think that it would take a damn sight more than a mere fit of jealousy to make Fenton risk his neck. We feel certain that there must be something much bigger at the back of it all, but beyond that we're absolutely gravelled."

Without replying, Marsden leaned forward and pulled open a drawer in his desk. He turned over some of its contents, and then, taking out an unmounted photograph, handed it to Colin.

" Do you recognise that ? " he asked.

Colin sat up with a sudden start of surprise.

" Recognise it ! " he exclaimed. " Of course I do. It's ' Spike ' Cooper."

" You're sure ? "

" Positive. You don't suppose I'd forget his

infernal face ?" He inspected the picture carefully for several seconds, and then passed it back. "Where did you get hold of this ?" he asked.

"It was sent to me three days ago by the Canadian police. Perhaps you would like to hear the letter that came with it."

He dived into the drawer again, and produced an official-looking sheet of blue paper.

"'With reference to your inquiry of the 3rd ult.,'" he read, "'we now enclose the photograph, record, and fingerprints of Luke Hammond, which were not included in our reply of the 15th. We have since ascertained that Hammond has left Canada and is probably in London.'"

"And what *is* his record ?" demanded Colin.

"Quite a useful one in its way," was the dry answer. "Two terms of imprisonment for house-breaking and one of ten years for robbery with violence. Our friends at Montreal seem to regard him as one of the show cases in their collection."

"Fenton has been in Canada," remarked Colin ; "at least, so it said in that report you gave me. They probably met each other over there."

"Not a doubt of it," returned the detective, "and, what's more, I shouldn't be surprised if he came to England on Fenton's invitation."

There was a pause. "We seem to be getting on," remarked Colin, "but, all the same, I'm hanged if I can make head or tail of it even now. Why on

earth should a cashiered Major and a Canadian crook be thirsting for my blood ?"

Marsden replaced the paper and shut the drawer.

"Dr. Gray," he said, "have you any objection to leaving this entirely in my hands for the next twenty-four hours ? I shall give instructions at once for the arrest of Cooper and Hudson, and you can take it from me that there are not likely to be any more attempts on your life. If it would make you more comfortable, I will arrange for you to be shadowed from the moment you leave this office."

"Good heavens, no !" exclaimed Colin. "It would make me feel as if I were a co-respondent in a divorce case. I should like to have five minutes alone with the blighter who hit me on the head, but if it can't be managed I'm quite content to leave him to you." He took his hands from his pockets and sat up in his chair. "And now," he added, "what have you got to tell me ? I'm dying to hear if you found out anything from this chap Kennedy."

Marsden glanced at his watch. "I have found out a good deal," he said, "and it was because I was anxious to talk it over with you that I asked you to come round. As things have turned out, however, it seemed to me more important that I should hear your story first. I am afraid now that we must put off our discussion until to-morrow. I have an appointment with the Commissioner in a few minutes, and it will probably be a couple of hours before I am free." He paused. "I don't mind

telling you one thing, doctor, and that is that there are going to be some developments in this case that will probably give you the biggest surprise of your life."

Colin received the news with apparent calmness. "Really!" he observed. "Well, I ought to be able to stand them. I've had plenty of practice one way and another."

Marsden turned to a memorandum tablet that was lying on his desk, and studied it for a moment in silence.

"I want you all three to be here at two o'clock to-morrow punctually," he said, "you and this man Bates and Miss Seymour." He picked up a pencil. "By the way, has Miss Seymour any other Christian name besides Nancy?"

Colin shook his head. "Not that I know of."

"And her exact age?"

"She will be nineteen on the third of February."

Marsden jotted down his reply, and then sat frowning thoughtfully at the pad.

"I suppose there's no more information you can give me in connection with her—no little fact or detail that you've forgotten to mention?"

Colin reflected. "By Jove, yes!" he exclaimed suddenly. "I've never told you that we're going to be married."

Allowing for the Inspector's naturally reserved manner, the effect of these few words was extraordinary. He pushed back his chair, stared for a

moment half incredulously, and then, slapping his knee, broke into a loud and prolonged chuckle of laughter.

Before either of them could speak again there was a tap outside, and an apologetic constable presented himself in the doorway.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, "but the Commissioner is ready to see you."

With an abrupt change of manner Marsden rose to his feet.

"Thank you, Jackson," he said. "I will be down immediately."

Then, as the door closed, he took a step forward, and with another hearty chuckle gripped hold of Colin's hand.

"I congratulate you with all my heart, doctor," he said. "Unless I'm a damned fool, you're the luckiest man in England."

"MORE coffee?" suggested Mark.

Colin pushed over his cup, and, having taken possession of the last slice of toast, proceeded to scrape out the remainder of the marmalade.

"I seem to be eating rather a lot," he observed apologetically. "I suppose it's the result of being in love."

Mark laughed and glanced at the clock. "It seems to have affected Nancy in the same way. Anyhow, this is the first time I've ever known her late."

"You mustn't be brutal with her," said Colin; "it's all my fault. I took her out to supper after the theatre last night, and we didn't get back to her place until nearly one o'clock. I expect she was a bit sleepy this morning."

"Well, I'll try and overlook it for once," replied Mark generously. He produced his pipe, and, after stuffing the bowl with tobacco, tossed the pouch across the table. "What are your plans for this morning?" he inquired.

"I've got to find Joe," was the answer. "Marsden wants him at the Yard at two o'clock, so I must go along to the Palace and see if I can get hold of his address."

"You had better tell him to come here at half-past twelve," said Mark. "He can have some lunch with us, and then you can all go up together in the car."

"That's a bright idea," agreed Colin. "I'm afraid that, in one way and another, I'm becoming a bit of a nuisance, though."

"Not the slightest," returned Mark. "I'm enjoying myself immensely. It's so dull down here as a rule that any little thing like a love-affair or an attempted murder is a perfect godsend."

He sauntered off to the surgery, and a few minutes later Colin, having scribbled a brief note to Nancy and left it on the hall-table, was striding along the street in the direction of Whitechapel Road.

No one could describe the thoroughfares through which he had to pass as picturesque or engaging, but in the crisp morning air, and with a yellow sun shining down from overhead, the two-mile walk was not without a certain attraction.

He was in the kind of mood, indeed, in which even the Dead Sea or the Sahara Desert would probably have appeared to possess some favourable features. Ever since he had discovered his real feelings towards Nancy the whole world seemed to have become an extraordinarily interesting and exciting place. At the present moment, both these sensations were intensified by the prospect of his approaching interview with Marsden. From the

way in which the detective had spoken there could be little doubt that he had made some important discoveries, and the mere thought that in a few hours he might be helping to track down the Professor's murderer was sufficient in itself to set every nerve in Colin's body tingling with a fierce elation.

Half an hour's walk brought him to the Palace, a gaudy structure wedged in between two public houses. The only person about who appeared to have any connection with the establishment was an elderly man with a bucket of paste, who was leisurely engaged in affixing a poster to one of the two boards which decorated each side of the entrance.

Colin pulled up alongside of him.

"Do you happen to know where Joe Bates lives?" he asked.

The other paused in his work, and eyed him with some suspicion.

"Yus," he replied, "an' wot abaht it?"

"Nothing much," returned Colin. "I happen to be a pal of his, and I want to see him. My name's Dr. Gray."

The elderly man's expression changed instantly. "Ow," he remarked, "that's orl right. I've 'eard 'im speak o' you. You're the bloke as mended 'im up when 'e was in 'orspital? Thinks the world o' you, Joe does, an' no error."

"Well, in that case," said Colin, "perhaps you will trust me with his address?"

"Why, o' course," was the answer. "No offence, mister, but I didn't know who you was when you come askin' fust. Might 'a' been one o' these 'ere rate collectors." He laid down his brush, and, stepping out on to the pavement, pointed across towards a narrow turning on the opposite side of the road. "You foller that," he said, "an' when you come to the last 'ouse on the right jest give a couple of taps on the front winder."

Colin thanked him, and, crossing the street, made his way down the alley in question, until he arrived at the farther end. Joe's residence proved to be a single-fronted dwelling of grimy brick, the ground floor window of which opened on to the street. A square of not over-clean muslin had been nailed up inside, in order to secure the owner's privacy, but at Colin's second knock this obstruction was cautiously lifted, and Joe's face peered out inquiringly through the dirty glass.

On recognising the visitor, it disappeared again at once, and the next moment a burly figure in trousers and shirt-sleeves swung open the front door.

"Couldn't believe me own eyes, doctor," announced the prize-fighter with a grin of welcome. "'Ow the blazes did you manage to find your way 'ere?"

"I got your address from an elderly gentleman who was shoving up bills outside the Palace," said Colin. "He wouldn't part with it until I told him who I was."

"Ah, that'd be old Tom," returned Joe, nodding his head. "'E ain't the sort to let 'is mouth flap, not unless 'e's sure of 'is comp'ny." He stepped back into the passage, holding open the door. "Come along in, doctor. I ain't got much of a place, but, such as it is, you're more than welcome."

Colin followed his host into a tiny apartment on the left, on the walls of which were nailed up a number of coloured prints, representing various well-known boxers in highly aggressive attitudes. In the centre of the room stood a deal table, containing a couple of bottles of Bass and the smaller half of a brown loaf. A bed, a dilapidated chair, and an old packing-case, full of odds and ends, completed the remainder of the furniture.

"I was jest goin' to 'ave me breakfast," explained Joe, indicating the refreshments. "If you'd fancy a drop, guv'nor, I can borrow a glass from the bloke upstairs."

"Not for me, thanks," said Colin. "I always go to sleep if I drink beer in the morning, and besides, I have only looked in to tell you that you'll be wanted this afternoon."

Joe's eyes glistened. "Goin' to shove it across 'em?" he inquired eagerly.

"I wish we were," was Colin's reply, "but I'm afraid it's nothing as exciting as that. The fact is, I had a talk with Inspector Marsden yesterday, and he wants you and me and Miss Seymour to meet him at Scotland Yard at two o'clock."

For a moment Joe seemed somewhat taken aback.

" If them's the orders," he said at last, " there ain't no more to be said abaht it. I never thought to see meself walkin' in there, though, not of me own accord."

" They'll be civil enough," said Colin. " They only want to hear your story about getting me out of the cellar."

" I dare say you're right," admitted Joe doubtfully. " I ain't got nothin' special against the perlice ; all I says is that the less you 'as to do with 'em the better." He paused. " Wot's the programme, guv'nor ? Do I jest step up to the front door an' 'and in me card ? "

" Dr. Ashton suggested that you should come round to the surgery. Then you can have some grub and drive up with us."

Joe shook his head. " Thankin' yer kindly, but if it's all the same I reckon I'll meet yer there. I gotter couple o' torfs comin' to the Palace for a lesson this mornin', an' it means a quid to me if I let 'em knock me abaht a bit."

" That's all right," said Colin, " as long as I can depend on you to keep the appointment."

" I'll be there, doctor," replied Joe. " I'll be there, honest. You bring the young laidy along in the car, and yer'll find me sittin' on the Embankment waitin' for yer."

Satisfied with this assurance, Colin took his departure, and, retracing his steps to the end of the

street, made his way back to Shadwell by the same route that he had come.

As he opened the door of the house he saw to his surprise that the note which he had left for Nancy was still lying on the hall-table. Before he had time to realise anything further Mark suddenly appeared from the surgery.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Colin. "I made sure you'd be out on your round."

"So I ought to be," replied Mark, "but, as a matter of fact, I was waiting for you."

"What's the matter?"

"I'm rather worried about Nancy. She's never turned up, and there's been no message from her."

Colin's whole figure stiffened abruptly.

"No message?" he repeated.

"Nothing. I can't understand it at all. If she's ill, surely she'd have let us know."

Without a word Colin swung round sharply, and, striding towards the pegs, unhooked his coat.

"What are you going to do?" demanded Mark.

"I'll get out the car and drive up there at once," he said. "Can you stop in for another twenty minutes? I'll telephone you directly I find out what's the matter."

Mark nodded. "Keep steady, old son. I expect it will be all right. There's probably some quite simple explanation."

Colin moistened his lips. "We were mad ever to let her leave the house," he said hoarsely. "If

any harm's come to her I'll kill Fenton with my own hands."

As he spoke the clock on the stairs chimed out eleven-thirty, and, turning hastily to the door, he hurried out again into the street.

If there is any truth in the theory that each of us possesses a guardian angel, the fact that a quarter of an hour later Colin drew up safely at the corner of Jubilee Place must be regarded as an amazing tribute to the efficiency of his own particular escort.

Leaving the car in the gutter, he jumped out on to the pavement, and the next moment he was mounting the narrow staircase which led up to the first landing.

There were two studios on this floor, the one which Nancy rented being distinguished by a small brass knocker. Catching hold of the knob, Colin rapped loudly, and then, bending down, lifted up the flap of the letter box.

" Nancy," he called out, " are you there ? It is I—Colin." There was no answer.

He straightened himself slowly, and as he did so the door of the second studio was pulled back and a girl appeared in the opening. She was a fair-haired, cheerful-looking girl, wearing a brown overall and smoking a cigarette.

" Excuse my butting in," she said, " but do you want to speak to Miss Seymour ? "

Colin took off his hat. " I do," he said, " rather particularly."

" Well, I'm afraid it's no good waiting," was the answer. " She went out just after eight o'clock this morning, and I know she won't be back till late, because she asked me to take in a parcel for her."

" I suppose you don't happen to know where she was going to ? " asked Colin. " Please forgive my curiosity, but I am a friend of Dr. Ashton's, for whom Miss Seymour works, and as she hasn't turned up and has sent no message, we are both feeling rather anxious about her."

" She has gone to see her lawyer," replied the girl. " He sent a car round to fetch her, that's why she went off in such a hurry."

Colin stared at her in astonishment. " Her lawyer ? " he repeated.

" That's what she told me. I think from the way she spoke he wanted to see her suddenly about some important business. Anyhow, I know the chauffeur brought a letter with him, because she had it in her hand."

" Did you notice the man ? " demanded Colin. ' Would you be able to describe him again ? "

The girl raised her eyebrows. " I don't suppose so," she said coolly. " He was on the landing, but it doesn't happen to be a habit of mine to stare at chauffeurs."

With a big effort Colin pulled himself together.

" I beg your pardon," he said. " Perhaps I ought to explain. Miss Seymour and I are engaged to be married, so you will understand why I'm

feeling worried about this sudden disappearance of hers."

The girl looked up at him sympathetically. "Why, of course," she replied, "but surely there's no reason to be alarmed? I expect she intended to ring up when she reached the lawyer's office, and then something came along and put it out of her head. She has probably done so by now."

"It won't take me long to find out, anyhow," said Colin. He paused. "Are you likely to be at home the rest of the day?" he asked.

His companion nodded. "Yes," she said. "I live here. I'm an artist."

"Then, just in case Miss Seymour does come home, would you mind asking her to let Dr. Ashton know immediately?"

"Certainly I will," said the girl. "Even if I don't hear her, she's sure to look in in order to see about the parcel." She hesitated. "I—I should like to congratulate you, if I may," she added. "I don't know Miss Seymour very well—I have only been in this studio a few weeks—but one's merely got to speak to her to see that she's a perfect dear."

In spite of his anxiety, Colin smiled at her gratefully.

"Thank you so much," he said. "I'll tell Nancy what a brick you've been."

He shook her hand, and, leaving her standing in the doorway, hurried downstairs again into the street.

There was a chemist's shop at the corner which boasted a public telephone, and, entering the box, he rang up Mark.

"No news here," came the reply in answer to his first inquiry. "How about you?"

In a few words Colin acquainted him with the story he had just been told, giving the bare facts exactly as he had heard them from the girl.

"It seems a devilish queer business," was Mark's comment, after a short pause. "What are you going to do about it?"

"I know the name of her lawyer at Helston," said Colin. "It's Penwarren. I shall send a telegram at once to find out whether he's in London."

"And suppose he's not?"

"In that case there's only one explanation. She's in the hands of that brute Fenton, and——"

"Look here," broke in Mark, "shall I come up and join you? I can easily put off my round until this evening."

"I would rather you stayed at the surgery for the present," replied Colin. "A message might come through from Nancy any time, and I shall have to give Penwarren your address so that he can have somewhere to reply to. I'll ring you up again about half-past one, before I see Marsden. We ought to have an answer by then."

"I'll be here," said Mark. "Don't you worry more than you can help. Even if you're right,

Nancy can't be in any real danger ; the police will have her back in a few hours."

"Please God," said Colin fervently.

He replaced the receiver, and, leaving the shop, walked on quickly up the King's Road until he reached the post office.

Here, after destroying two previous attempts, he wrote out the following wire, which he signed in Mark's name :

*I shall be very grateful if you will let me know immediately whether Mr. Penwarren is in London and whether he has any business to discuss with Miss Nancy Seymour. Miss Seymour is in my employment. The matter is extremely urgent.*

He handed this to the girl behind the counter, and, having paid for a reply, made his way back to where he had left the car.

He had done everything he could think of for the present, but the knowledge of this fact deepened rather than lessened his anxiety. The whole affair was so extraordinary that he had an instinctive feeling that there must be something evil at the back of it. Was it likely or even possible that the summons which Nancy had received could really have come from Mr. Penwarren ? Even if he were in Town, for what conceivable reason could he have sent to fetch her at eight o'clock in the morning ? And yet, knowing Nancy's character, it seemed

equally incredible that she should have left the studio under such circumstances, without being absolutely convinced that the message was a genuine one.

If she had fallen into a trap, there could be no doubt whose hand had set it. The affair in Flood Lane proved that, whatever motive lurked behind Fenton's proceedings, he had now reached a point where nothing would be allowed to stand in his way. He was certainly quite capable of having abducted Nancy, though, in view of the hue and cry which he must have known would immediately follow, it was difficult to imagine how he could have hoped to avoid discovery. From all appearances it seemed to be either the work of a madman, or else the final stroke in some deliberate scheme, the apparent weaknesses of which had already been carefully guarded against.

It was the dread of this latter alternative which was clutching at Colin's heart as he once more reached the corner of Jubilee Place. Should it prove to be the true explanation, every minute was obviously of the greatest value, and the prospect of remaining idle for the next two hours filled him with an almost intolerable revolt.

Unless he could get hold of Marsden personally, however, it seemed useless to communicate with the police until he had received a reply from Helston. They were not likely to take action on mere suspicion, especially when the Inspector himself had

promised to be on the spot at two o'clock. As to whether there was any chance of his arriving earlier Colin had no idea, but, since the only other course was to do nothing, he decided that he might just as well drive up to Whitehall straight away.

With this resolve he started the car, and, turning down through Burton Court on to the Embankment, swung round to the left in the direction of Westminster Bridge. A sharp run of about seven minutes brought him to the Yard gates, where, as usual, a couple of stalwart-looking constables were standing on duty. Colin recognised one of them as his acquaintance of the previous day, and with a friendly nod he pulled up alongside.

"That's all right, sir," observed the man approvingly. "No objection to your coming in now we know who you are."

Colin leaned forward from the driving seat.

"Do you happen to know whether Mr. Marsden is about anywhere?" he asked. "He made an appointment with me for two o'clock, but something rather important has cropped up, and if possible I should like to see him at once."

"He hasn't been in this way," was the policeman's answer, "but he might have come along by one of the other entrances. You can go inside and inquire, if you like. The officer on duty will be able to find out for you."

Colin thanked him, and, steering his car through

the gates, came to a halt in front of the broad flight of steps which led up to the main door.

Another constable advanced inquiringly.

"I don't think so," he replied, in answer to Colin's question; "but if you like to wait a moment I can let you know for certain."

He disappeared within the building, returning after a short absence with a significant shake of his head.

"No one's heard anything of him yet, sir. They expect him at two o'clock, though."

"I know," said Colin. "I've got an appointment with him." He paused. "Can I leave the car here until then?"

The constable scratched his head. "Well, this ain't exactly a garage," he replied doubtfully. "Still, if you back her up quite into that corner——"

He turned aside as he spoke, and, pocketing the five shillings which Colin slipped into his hand, sauntered back to his former position.

* * * * *

With the best part of an hour and a half before him Colin came out into Whitehall and paused irresolutely on the edge of the pavement. Of all the tasks with which an impatient man can be confronted, that of killing time is perhaps the most trying. He was not in the least hungry, and, in any case, there was something ghastly in the thought

of sitting all that while in a half-empty restaurant, brooding miserably over what might have happened to Nancy. If he wished to keep his nerves steady, it seemed to him that some form of exercise was imperatively needed, and, without hesitating further, he made his way across Parliament Green, and struck off westwards along the Embankment.

The soundness of his instinct was proved by the fact that when he arrived back at Westminster Bridge, after a vigorous tramp of about six miles, he felt that, whatever the next few hours might bring, his mind and judgment were once more under proper control. The hands of Big Ben were already at five and twenty minutes to two, and, knowing that there was a public telephone in the station, he crossed the road and entered the box. After a brief delay he succeeded in getting Mark's number.

"That you, Colin?" came the latter's voice. "Yes, I've just got an answer to the wire. It arrived a few minutes ago. If you hold on I'll read it out to you." There was a pause. "'Mr. Penwarren is ill in bed at Helston. As far as we are aware he has had no communication with Miss Seymour for the last eighteen months. Should be glad of an explanation.'"

"It's only what I expected," said Colin quietly. "There must be something wrong, or Nancy would have let us know long before this."

"Have you told the police?"

"Not yet. I went up to the Yard, but Marsden

hadn't arrived, so I thought I'd better wait until we got the reply from Helston."

" Where are you telephoning from ? "

" Westminster Bridge Station. I've arranged to meet Joe close by here, and, unless anything's happened, he ought to be along in a few minutes. By that time Marsden will probably have turned up."

There was a pause.

" Well, I'm ready when you want me," observed Mark. " In case there's going to be trouble, you can count me in to the limit."

" I know that," returned Colin gratefully. " If there's any possible way in which you can be of help I'll ring you up and let you know."

He put down the receiver, and, leaving the station, walked slowly round the corner on to the Embankment. A few yards past the entrance to the Yard, on the opposite side of the road, were a couple of empty seats facing the river. He crossed over towards the first one, and, having lighted himself a cigarette, sat down patiently to wait for Joe.

Just as the opening strokes of a quarter to two were chiming out from the clock tower, the latter made his appearance. In a quiet and unobtrusive fashion he slipped suddenly into view round the pedestal of Boadicea's statue, and at the same moment a grin of recognition broke over his face as his eyes lit upon Colin. He quickened his steps, and came rapidly up to the seat.

"Thought you might be early, doctor," he began, "so I come along a bit ahead o' me time on purpose." He looked round inquiringly. "But where's the young lady?"

Colin, who had thrown away his cigarette, rose to his feet. "I've got some bad news for you, Joe," he said. "Miss Seymour has disappeared."

Joe's mouth opened, and he gazed blankly at his companion.

"Disappeared!" he repeated.

"She was taken away in a car at eight o'clock this morning. Someone tricked her into leaving the studio by means of a false message."

With a muttered oath Joe clutched him by the arm.

"Wot, the saime fellow that tried to do you in?"

Colin nodded. "Unless I'm wrong, it's the man I spoke to you about—Major Fenton; the one who was talking to 'Spike' Cooper outside the station."

"Well, if yer knows that," excalimed Joe, "wot are we messin' abaht 'ere for? Why don't we go an' wring 'is neck?"

"Because we've got to find him first," returned Colin curtly. "That's why I've been waiting to keep this appointment with the Inspector. The police are after him too, so they may be able to help us."

Joe wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. "Let's get over and see 'em, guv'nor. I wouldn't 'ave no 'arm come to that young laidy,

not for all the money in the Bank of England."

Colin gave a queer laugh. "I think I can understand the feeling," he said.

They crossed the road towards the Yard, where the same two constables were still on duty.

"You're all right now, mister," remarked one of them. "I saw him come in by the other way a few minutes ago."

With a nod of thanks Colin passed through the gates, and, followed by Joe, who kept casting mistrustful glances to right and left, walked rapidly up to the main entrance.

The recipient of his five shilling tip stepped forward to meet him.

"Mr. Marsden has just come, sir," he announced. "Told me that when you and your party arrived, I was to bring you in straightaway."

"Well, this is my party," said Colin. "At least, all of it that's likely to turn up."

He beckoned to Joe, who had halted a couple of paces in the rear, and, mounting the steps, the two of them followed the constable into the building. He led the way up the staircase to Marsden's room, where, in response to his knock, the Inspector himself opened the door. Over his shoulder Colin caught sight of another man in plain clothes, who was standing with his back to the fire.

"Come along in, doctor," exclaimed the detective. "I've got someone here you ought to know

—Inspector Ainsworth, of the Investigation Department. He has been doing some rather useful work for you during the last twenty-four hours."

Colin shook hands with his new acquaintance, a stout, grey-haired individual, who eyed him with considerable interest.

" And this is our friend Bates, eh ? " continued Marsden, turning a sharp glance on Joe. " But where's Miss Seymour ? I thought you were going to bring her with you."

" You had better hear what I've got to tell you straightaway," said Colin. " Miss Seymour never came to Shadwell this morning. I went up to her flat just before midday, and I found out from the girl next door that someone had called for her in a car at eight o'clock with a letter from her lawyer in Cornwall."

" What, Penwarren ? " broke out Marsden. " Impossible ! Why, he's seriously ill down at Helston."

" I know," said Colin. " I sent him a wire at once and I've just got the answer. The letter was a forgery."

" And Miss Seymour ? " demanded Marsden quickly.

" She went away in the car and nothing has been heard of her since."

Marsden took a couple of paces across the room, and then turned to his colleague.

" I blame myself for this, Ainsworth," he said. " I ought to have had the place watched."

"That's so," assented the other. "All the same, I don't think there's any harm done. It's plain enough what they're after, but if they want to bring it off they'll have to take her abroad. You can't work that sort of gadget in England."

There was a short pause, which was broken by Marsden. "You had better get hold of Graham immediately. Tell him that the girl's been kidnapped, and that an attempt will probably be made to smuggle her out of the country. They're already on the look-out for Cooper, so it will only be a matter of sending another message."

Giving a curt nod, Ainsworth strode to the door, and, with an abrupt change in his manner, Marsden addressed himself to Colin.

"I am sorry this has happened," he said, "especially as it's partly my fault. I wish you could have let me know sooner."

"I came along immediately," retorted Colin, "but you weren't here."

For a moment Marsden hesitated. "Have you any idea who Miss Seymour really is?" he asked slowly.

Colin stared at him. "What do you mean?" he demanded.

"She is the granddaughter of Professor Carter, and the heiress to nearly a quarter of a million of money."

If the Professor himself had suddenly appeared through the doorway Colin's amazement could hardly have been more complete.

" Good heavens ! " he stammered. " Is this true? Are you certain of it ? "

" I am quite certain of it—now," was the answer. " I have suspected it was so for the last two days, but what I have found out this morning puts the matter beyond question." He took hold of a chair and thrust it towards Colin. " Sit down for a moment, doctor. I know how impatient and anxious you must be feeling, but I can assure you that I shan't waste a second. Before we go any further it's essential that you should hear the truth."

" Get on with it, then," said Colin hoarsely. " I don't want a chair. I'd rather stand."

Marsden walked across to his desk and seated himself in front of an open cardboard file, containing a number of papers.

" Do you remember what I told you the morning after the murder ? " he asked. " That if we could find the Professor's old servant, Kennedy, we should probably learn something which would alter our whole view of the case ? "

Colin nodded.

" Well, a couple of days ago I got a message from the Hertford police that they had run him to earth in a small village near Hoddesdon. He has been paralysed and bedridden for some months, and as the old woman who has been looking after him can't even read or write, he might easily have died without ever hearing of the murder. As it was, we got hold of him just in time. I went down there yesterday,

and, although he was so ill that he could hardly speak, he managed to give me the one bit of information that I was so badly in need of. He told me that twenty-three years ago Nancy Carter, the Professor's only daughter, then a girl of eighteen, had run away from her home and married a young artist called Richmond Seymour."

Colin took a step forward, but before he could speak the detective raised his hand.

"Let me finish first, and then I'll answer any questions you like. It seems from Kennedy's story that the Professor was one of those self-willed, obstinate sort of people who simply don't know the meaning of the word forgiveness. He had forbidden this marriage, and, since his daughter had chosen to disobey him, he made up his mind that he would have nothing more to do with her. Kennedy tells me that from that time forward he never even mentioned her name again.

"Well, to cut a long story short, as soon as I heard this the two names 'Nancy Seymour' came back to my mind at once. I'd written them down in my notebook that day in the King's Road, and somehow or other they'd stuck in my memory ever since. I knew nothing about the young lady except the fact that she'd helped to save me from having my face kicked in, but I guessed it was likely that you two had kept in touch with each other, and so directly I got back to Town I phoned you to come up." He paused. "I thought you'd probably be

able to give me some information, doctor, and, by Jove, you did."

Colin came across to the desk, and, leaning over the back, stared eagerly in the detective's face.

"Go on, man," he exclaimed; "for heaven's sake tell me what you mean!"

"I mean this," returned Marsden. "You not only convinced me that Miss Seymour is the Professor's granddaughter, but you opened my eyes to one of the most remarkable and cleverly laid crimes that it's ever been my job to tackle."

"Who did it?" demanded Colin. "Who killed the Professor?"

"I am not referring to the murder. I don't believe that had anything to do with the original scheme. It was an accident—a very awkward accident, and quite unforeseen. In all probability no one regretted it more bitterly than the two men who were chiefly responsible for it—Major Fenton and Mr. Medwin."

"Mr. Medwin!" repeated Colin in a whisper.

"Yes," was the answer. "I'll stake my official reputation that the whole of this interesting plan originated in the brain of Mr. James Stanhope Medwin, solicitor, commissioner for oaths, and I should think about the most complete rascal that ever cheated a client."

Colin drew in a long breath. "I was right then. I felt that he was up to some devil's work the first time I saw him." He leaned forward again, his

eyes alight with anger. "How did you find all this out?"

"Well, one thing was quite plain; whoever broke into the Red Lodge the first time was after some particular object which the Professor kept in his desk. According to his own statement to you, he had nothing there except his private papers, and, unless my information was wrong, the only person who was likely to have known this was Medwin. I always make it a rule in business to suspect everyone, no matter who they are, and so, in spite of our friend's plausible manner and professional standing, I put him on the list straight away.

"It was the merest guess-work at first, but when I discovered that the Professor had left a large fortune and had made no will, I began to wonder whether this rather important fact had any connection with the attempt to search his papers. Supposing that Medwin had had reasons for believing in the existence of a legal heir, but at the same time had been unable to get hold of any definite information on the subject. It was quite conceivable—allowing him to be a bad lot—that he might have arranged the burglary with a little professional assistance, and, for all we knew, might even have succeeded in finding out what he wanted.

"The weak point in this theory was the fact that up till then the man had apparently had an unblemished record. However, I set Ainsworth to work, and he very soon dug up a few facts which

put quite a different complexion on the matter. He found out that some time ago our respectable friend, who has always had a taste for speculation, suddenly became bitten with the Turf. For the past two years he has been betting heavily with several of the leading bookmakers, and one of them—we know these gentry pretty well at the Yard—confided to us that his own profit in the transactions already amounted to a good many thousand pounds.

" Having got so far, I came more or less to a standstill. I felt convinced in my own mind that, even if Medwin knew nothing about the murder, he was certainly up to some hanky-panky with regard to the money, but it's one thing to believe a man guilty and quite another to prove it.

" It was my interview with Kennedy, and your story coming on top of that, which suddenly did the business. I realised at once, then, that if Miss Seymour was really the Professor's granddaughter, Medwin and Fenton and this fellow Cooper were probably all in the same game. No doubt Cooper had been roped in to help with the burglary, and, although I had no actual evidence that Fenton and Medwin were friends——"

" I could have told you that," interrupted Colin. " I saw a photograph of Fenton on his mantelpiece the day he took me to his house."

" Did you ? " returned Marsden. " Well, it's a pity you never thought of mentioning the fact ; it might have put me on the right track straight away.

As it is, we've had a fairly strenuous thirty-six hours. Our people have been ransacking Cornwall and London to verify the truth of Kennedy's story, and by one o'clock to-day we pretty well completed our case." He laid his hand on the pile. "I have here all the evidence of Mrs. Seymour's marriage and death, and the birth certificate of her daughter. There is no doubt that Miss Seymour was her only child, and she is therefore the sole heiress to the Professor's money."

"I've just a couple of questions I want to ask you," said Colin abruptly. "In the first place, what did these two devils mean to do with Nancy?"

"Marry her to Fenton before she found out the truth. Unfortunately for them, the young lady didn't prove such an easy catch as they expected. I fancy you got most of the credit for that, hence the happy notion of putting you out of the way."

Colin nodded grimly. "And what exactly is your theory about the murder?"

"I haven't the least doubt that it was the work of 'Spike' Cooper. In all probability the other two knew nothing about it. I expect that when he broke into the house the first time—most likely in company with Medwin—he took the opportunity of having a look at the safe. It struck him as being a soft job, and so, without saying a word to the others, he made up his mind to come back again later on and see if there was anything worth collecting. Through

some cursed accident the Professor happened to blunder across him, and——"

"But if you know all this," broke out Colin passionately, "why haven't you arrested them?"

The Inspector looked up at him with unruffled coolness. "We have done everything that's possible," he replied. "I can't bring a charge against Medwin without some actual proof, and we're not likely to find that until we get hold of Cooper and Fenton. I've a warrant out for each of them, and it's only a matter of a few hours before they'll both be in custody."

"And meanwhile——" exclaimed Colin.

"Yes, I know," interrupted the Inspector quickly; "they have managed to trap the girl. There's no question about that, but you can take it from me that she's not in any great danger. Every port in England is being closely watched, and unless they can get her over to the Continent, and force her into a marriage——"

"Do you think I'm content to sit down here and trust to a lot of damned country policemen?" shouted Colin hotly. He wheeled round as he spoke, at the same time beckoning to Joe, who, throughout the whole interview, had remained standing discreetly in the background.

The Inspector jumped up from his chair. "What are you going to do?" he demanded.

"Do!" repeated Colin. "I'm going to find

Medwin. He'll know where Nancy is, and I'll get the truth out of him if I have to cut him in pieces."

He turned towards the door.

"Stop!" said Marsden sharply. He stepped forward, his hard blue eyes fixed upon the flushed and angry face of his companion.

"You mean this seriously, doctor?"

"O' course 'e does," chimed in Joe; "an' the saime 'ere, mister."

"I mean to find out what they're doing with Nancy," repeated Colin. "If Medwin won't speak, I'll damned well make him."

For a moment Marsden stood motionless, glancing thoughtfully from one to the other of them.

"I'm hanged if I haven't a good mind to let you try it," he said suddenly. "It's just one of those mad things that might come off—provided it's properly handled."

"We'll handle it all right," said Colin. "You can trust me for that."

"I hope I can," retorted Marsden. "I tell you frankly that if it weren't for Miss Seymour I should lock you both up straight away. I feel, however, that it's my carelessness that's got her into this mess, and if you can possibly force the truth out of Medwin it may save her a lot of unpleasantness." He paused. "How do you propose to set about it?"

"I shall go down to his house," said Colin, "and tax him with the whole story."

Marsden hesitated. "It will mean showing our

cards with a vengeance," he said, " but as things are I don't really know that it matters. He'd be bound to take alarm directly he heard of the arrest of Fenton and Cooper, and however much you frighten him he hasn't a dog's chance of getting away." He took another step forward, and contemplated Colin from under his bushy eyebrows. " You quite understand the position, my young friend. Supposing anything goes wrong, it will be of no use expecting me to help you. From the moment you leave this office you will be acting entirely on your own responsibility."

" Of course we shall," said Colin coolly. " The first thing you'll know about it is when we ring up and tell you the result."

With a faint twitch of his lips the detective held out his hand.

" Good luck to you, doctor," he said. " That young lady deserves *a man*, and I'll take my oath she's got one."

ALBERT TERRACE appeared even more peaceful and respectable than usual as Colin turned in at the farther end and came to a standstill in front of Mr. Medwin's house.

"This is the place, Joe," he said quietly. "Now you're quite clear in your own mind about what we've arranged?"

Joe nodded. "I got it, guv'nor. You ask whether 'e's at 'ome, an' if 'e is, in we goes. Then it'll be my job to shove it across the butler."

"That's right," said Colin. "I'm trusting you to look after the two servants until I've finished with Medwin."

"I'll look after 'em," grunted Joe. "There won't be no trouble in that quarter, you taike my word for it."

They got out of the car, and, leading the way up the path, Colin pressed the electric bell.

After a brief delay they heard the sound of steps inside, and the next moment Medwin himself opened the door. For an instant he stood gazing dumbly at his two visitors, then with a sudden expansive smile he stepped forward and held out his hand.

"Why, bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "This

is a very pleasant surprise. What an extraordinary bit of good luck that I happened to be at home."

"Isn't it!" said Colin genially. "I was just saying to Joe that it was a hundred to one that we shouldn't find you." He paused. "Oh, by the way, may I introduce you? This is an old friend of mine, Mr. Joe Bates. I've brought him along because we both want to ask your advice."

With a deferential gesture, Joe raised his finger to his forehead.

"'Ow d'ye do, sir," he remarked. "Pleased to meet yer."

"I hope we haven't called at a very inconvenient time," continued Colin. "The matter is rather an urgent one, and I felt that I should like to have your opinion on it."

"You needn't apologise, my dear boy," returned Mr. Medwin graciously. "If I can be of any assistance to you I shall be only too pleased." He moved back, making room for them to enter. "I have to be my own butler to-day, because both my man and his wife are out for the afternoon. I send them to a *matinée* now and then, just to keep them in a good temper."

Colin and Joe stepped into the hall, the latter, who was the last to enter, closing the door carefully behind him.

"I think the study will be the best place for us," continued their host. "Perhaps you'd like a whisky and soda or a glass of port first, though?"

Colin declined politely, and, still radiating good nature, Mr. Medwin ushered them into a small room on the left, where a bright fire was burning in the grate.

"I use this as a kind of annexe to my office," he added. "A large number of my clients are Kensington people, and so sometimes it's very convenient to be able to see them here."

"It's very convenient for us," said Colin. "As a matter of fact, we were particularly anxious to find you alone."

The other, who was in the act of pulling forward a chair, glanced up sharply at the change in his visitor's voice.

Colin took a step forward.

"I've got several things to say to you, Medwin, but before I start, just get this fact plainly into your head. If you attempt to call out or to make the least noise, I'll smash your face to a jelly."

There was a moment of dead silence, then very slowly Medwin stepped back to the fire-place and moistened his lips.

"Have you gone mad?" he demanded.

"Sit down," said Colin curtly.

He pointed to the chair, and, with a face from which every vestige of colour had suddenly departed, the lawyer silently obeyed his instructions. Joe moved softly towards him across the room, a formidable and menacing figure in the grey afternoon light.

It was Colin who was the first to speak.

"What have you and Fenton done with Miss Seymour?"

Medwin, who by an amazing effort seemed to have recovered some of his self-possession, looked up with an expression of blank amazement.

"I have never heard of Miss Seymour," he answered. "In fact, I haven't the remotest notion what you're talking about."

Colin came a step nearer. "Haven't you?" he said. "Then perhaps I'd better explain."

He thrust his hand under Medwin's chin, and, jerking up his face, stared down into his eye

"Now, you damned liar," he said, "listen to me. You know as well as I do who Miss Seymour is. You have known it ever since you broke into the Red Lodge and opened the Professor's desk."

He released his hold and, gripping Medwin by the collar, shook him backwards and forwards as a dog shakes a rat.

"I'd kill you where you sit if I didn't want an answer to my question. You've not only tried to rob and ruin this girl, but if it wasn't for you and Fenton the Professor would be still alive."

He flung back the half-throttled man with such force that the woodwork of the chair cracked and splintered beneath his weight.

Joe, who had been looking on with silent approval, hauled the victim unceremoniously to his feet.

"Nah, cocky," he said, "where's the young laidy? Spit it aht quick."

Choking and gasping for breath, Medwin retreated towards the sofa.

"You're making some terrible mistake. I know nothing about it, on my honour."

"Your *what*?" Colin laughed unpleasantly. "I don't know if you're really under the impression that you can bluff this out, Medwin, but if you are, you're making the mistake of your life."

He put his hand in his pocket, and, pulling out a coil of whipcord, which he had stopped to purchase on his way down, tossed it across to Joe.

"Lay him on the sofa," he said, "and tie up his feet and hands. If he makes the slightest sound, give him a punch in the mouth."

Joe moved forward with alacrity, and, turning to the fire-place, Colin picked up a small ornamental poker which was standing against the hearth and thrust it deliberately into the hottest part of the fire. Then, lighting himself a cigarette, he stood looking on in silence, while with swift efficiency Joe proceeded to carry out his instructions.

"That will do," he observed at last. "Now, Medwin, you can take your choice. You will either tell me at once where Miss Seymour is, or else I shall burn the truth out of you with that poker."

Trussed and helpless, Medwin gazed across at him from the sofa.

"For heaven's sake think what you're doing," he

whispered. "Can't you see that the whole thing's a ghastly blunder? I swear to you on my oath that I have never even heard of either of the people you have mentioned."

"In that case," said Colin, "it's rather curious that you keep a photograph of Fenton on your dining-room mantelpiece."

He stooped down, and, drawing out the poker which was now a glowing red, advanced relentlessly towards the sofa.

Two little beads of perspiration broke out on Medwin's forehead and trickled down into his eyes.

"Stop!" he gasped. "Stop! You young devil, I believe you mean it."

Colin laughed again. "Shove something in his mouth, Joe. We don't want the whole street to hear him squealing."

By a violent effort Medwin managed to wriggle himself up into a sitting position.

"It's all right, Gray," he said quietly. "You needn't go any further. I know when I'm beaten."

He sank back against the cushions, and with a queer half-incredulous expression, stared up into Colin's face.

"I am not often mistaken in my judgment of people," he said, "but I seem to have blundered pretty badly with regard to you."

"Answer my question," said Colin. "Where's Miss Seymour?"

"She's at Fenton's cottage in Essex, close to South Ockendon. It's a small white house called 'The Firs,' on the right hand of the road, just before you reach the village."

Colin walked to the desk and wrote down his directions on a blank sheet of paper.

"Why have you taken her there?"

"It was Fenton's idea," said Medwin slowly. "He has a boat lying in the Thames close by, and he thought that if he could persuade her to go for a short cruise she might change her opinion about the impossibility of marrying him."

With his fists clenched Joe started forward, but before he could strike Colin thrust him back.

"Leave him alone, Joe," he said harshly. "It's the truth we want, no matter what it is." He turned to Medwin, who was watching them with surprising coolness. "Do you know what his plans are exactly?"

"He means to take her on board as soon as it's dark. Where he will go then depends chiefly on the weather. I believe he has some idea of trying to reach Holland."

"What, by himself, in mid-winter?"

"Oh, he's not alone," returned Medwin. "He has two old acquaintances of yours with him—Cooper and Hudson. In the course of their varied lives they have both served before the mast."

For a moment Colin remained silent, his eyes fixed steadily upon the lawyer's face.

"I don't know whether you're telling me the truth, Medwin," he said. "If you're not, heaven help you. I'll find you again, no matter where you try to hide, and I'll tear your lying tongue out of your throat with my own fingers."

Medwin nodded. "Yes," he said, "I can quite believe you would, but, fortunately, such an unpleasant proceeding won't be necessary. As I told you before, I know when the game's up."

Colin replaced the poker in the grate, then, crossing to the desk, on which stood a portable telephone, he unhooked the receiver and asked for Marsden's number. The lawyer watched him curiously.

"Hallo!" came the Inspector's voice.

"This is Gray. I'm speaking from Albert Terrace. I've got the information I wanted."

"You mean you know where the girl is?"

"Yes. She's at a cottage in Essex, close to South Ockendon. Fenton means to take her on board his boat as soon as it's dark."

"Who told you this?"

"Medwin. I had to use a certain amount of persuasion, but I think it's true."

"What have you done to him?"

"He's all right. He's lying on the sofa listening to what I'm saying. We've tied him up, and we propose to leave him here."

"How about the servants?"

"Both out at the theatre. They're not likely to be back until half-past five."

"Sounds as if you'd made a pretty tidy job of it," was Marsden's comment. "You'd better come back here as quickly as possible and pick me up in the car. If what he's told you is right, the sooner we have a look at this cottage the better."

"We're starting now," replied Colin. "We'll be with you in a quarter of an hour."

He rang off, and, picking up his hat from the chair, turned to Medwin.

"This is your last chance," he said. "You know what to expect if you've sent me on a false errand."

"You can make your mind quiet easy," returned the other. "You'll find Miss Seymour at the cottage, and I have no doubt she will be delighted to see you. You're exactly the sort of primitive young savage that appeals to women."

Joe stepped forward pleadingly. "Let me give 'im one, doctor—only just one. That'll learn 'im to call you names."

"No," said Colin. "Leave him alone. He'll have all he deserves by the time we've finished with him."

He walked towards the door, and, with one reluctant glance at the smiling and half-prostrate figure on the sofa, Joe followed him out into the hall.

* * * * *

Two men muffled up in long coats, who were waiting just inside the entrance, stepped forward at

once as the car came to a standstill again at the main gateway of the Yard.

From under the peaked cap of the former the sharp eyes of Inspector Marsden travelled swiftly and approvingly over its two occupants.

" Well, you don't waste much time, doctor," he observed. " I will say that for you."

" I'd have been here a lot sooner if it hadn't been for the usual cursed jam in Piccadilly," returned Colin viciously.

As he spoke he leaned over and swung open the back door of the car.

" Just a minute," said the Inspector quietly. " Before we start I'd like to hear a few more details about this interview of yours with Medwin. We don't want to go chasing down into Essex unless——"

" I'll give you the facts," interrupted Colin. " If you don't think they are good enough to act on you can leave it to Joe and me."

In a few blunt words he described the scene which had taken place in the study, the two detectives standing silently beside the car, and Joe nodding his head at intervals as though to confirm the truth of the story.

" I can't swear that he hasn't invented the whole thing," finished Colin, " but, all the same, I'm pretty certain there's something in it. Whatever else Medwin may be, he isn't a fool. He knows perfectly well I meant what I said, and in my opinion

he's had the sense to chuck up the sponge in order to save his own skin."

"The guv'nor's right, mister," broke in Joe earnestly. "'E's a lyin' swine, this bloke, but 'e didn't fancy the idea of 'avin' 'is tongue torn out, you could see that by 'is faice."

Marsden laughed grimly. "I dare say you could!" He turned to Colin. "I'm shocked and surprised that you should have taken the law into your own hands in this way, but, between ourselves, I believe you've done the trick." He jerked his head towards the back of the car. "Jump in, sergeant. We can make use of the doctor's information even if we don't approve of his methods."

As he spoke he seated himself alongside of Colin, while the sergeant, a heavily-built individual with a chin like the toe of a boot, clambered up obediently into the tonneau. Directly he was on board Colin thrust in his clutch, and the next moment they were spinning up the broad roadway in the direction of Waterloo Bridge.

"I suppose I made it plain that this isn't going to be any sort of a picnic," said Colin, with a side glance at his companion. "According to Medwin, we've got Cooper and Hudson to tackle as well as Fenton, and I should think it's a hundred to one that they'll all three be armed."

"Cooper will for a certainty," replied the Inspector, "and, what's more, he won't hesitate to shoot. However, I took the precaution of slipping

a Smith and Webley into my pocket, and I told Bentley to do the same. If Mister Cooper prefers a bullet to a rope, he can damned well take his choice."

"I only hope Medwin doesn't get away," said Colin, with some feeling. "He's tied up all right at present, but his servants will be back before we're through with this job, and directly they've set him loose he'll probably try to do a bolt."

"He may try," returned the Inspector, "but he won't get very far. I've sent down two of our best men to watch the house, and, no matter where he goes, they'll stick to him like his shadow."

He paused for a moment as Colin swerved round a cluster of startled pedestrians, and then added with a dry smile: "We don't want to waste any time, doctor, but you might just keep it in mind that I'm a married man, with three children dependent on me."

"I won't smash you up," replied Colin. "I may seem to be driving fast, but I've got too much at stake to play the fool."

He cut across the broad space at the corner of Farringdon Street, and, leaving the river on his right hand, plunged into one of the long warehouse-lined streets which lead through the heart of the City. The short day was already closing in, and the tall buildings on either side were a blaze of electric light.

"I don't know if you're in any doubt about the way," said the Inspector. "You had better consult

Bentley if you are. He's an Essex man himself, and knows every inch of the country."

"I think I can find it," was Colin's answer. He slowed down a little and glanced back over his shoulder. "We go through Barking and Rainham, don't we?"

The sergeant, who was sitting up stiffly alongside of Joe, nodded his head.

"That's right, sir. It's practically a straight road from there to South Ockendon."

They drove on silently through the crowded streets, the Inspector making no further attempt to talk, and Colin devoting his whole attention to the strenuous work of avoiding the traffic.

After negotiating the apparently interminable length of the Commerical Road and the East India Dock Road, they made their way through the squalid region of East Ham and emerged at last into the historic if evil smelling neighbourhood of Barking.

Then, bit by bit, the houses began to give place to stunted hedges and low-lying fields, while a little distance away on the right the red and green lights of the steamers passing up and down the Thames flashed out mysteriously in the gathering dusk.

Two miles of rapid driving brought them to the straggling village of Rainham, and, checking his speed a trifle as they ran through the main street, Colin swung out on to a lone stretch of country road, where, except for one or two farm carts and an

occasional belated cyclist, they seemed to be the only travellers.

He had covered about another three miles when, with a sudden movement, the sergeant leaned over from the back.

"We're getting pretty near now, sir," he observed. "If your information's right, the house we want ought to be somewhere about here."

Colin slackened down, and as he did so the bent figure of an old man, with a pitchfork over his shoulder, suddenly loomed into view out of an adjoining gateway.

"Here's someone who'll probably be able to help us," said Marsden. "Just pull up a moment, and we'll ask him."

They came to a standstill alongside the stranger, who blinked at them suspiciously from under his shaggy eyebrows.

Marsden leaned over and addressed him with a friendly nod.

"Good evening, uncle," he said. "I wonder if you can tell us whether there's a house called 'The Firs' anywhere around this neighbourhood."

With considerable deliberation the veteran unshipped his pitchfork.

"Whoy, yees, mister," he replied. "There be a 'ouse o' that name sure enough. There aren't no one there though, not as I knows on."

"That doesn't matter," said the Inspector. "We only want to have a look at the outside of it."

"You don't 'ave to go far for that," was the encouraging reply. "You'll find it on the right 'and side of the road soon as you've passed the nex' turnin'."

"I suppose you don't happen to know who owns the place?" inquired Marsden.

"Well, I 'ave 'eard that it's a rich gen'leman in London. Party o' the name o' Fenton. 'E don't use it much though, an' that's a fact; only comes down 'ere for an odd day or two now an' then."

"Just when he wants a breath of fresh air, eh?" suggested Marsden genially. "Well, I'm much obliged to you, uncle. Perhaps you'll get yourself a drink when the pubs open."

He produced a shilling, which the old man readily accepted, and, with a slight pressure of his foot on the clutch, Colin again set the car in motion.

"Don't hurry," whispered Marsden. "Drive us slowly past the place and then stop. If anyone's inside there's pretty sure to be a light in the windows."

Following his instructions, Colin proceeded noiselessly along the road, which curved away to the left about a hundred yards from where they had halted. As he rounded the bend a dark cluster of trees sprang into view a short distance ahead of him, and the next moment he was able to make out the roof and chimneys of a small house, which appeared to stand a little way back from the road.

"That's our mark," observed Marsden, with a grunt of satisfaction. He turned round in his seat and addressed the sergeant. "You hop out here, Bentley, and have a look at it from this side. We'll come back and meet you at the front gate."

With surprising quickness for so heavy a man, the sergeant stepped nimbly over on to the running board, and, just as they reached the shelter of the trees, dropped down into the roadway.

Driving on slowly, Colin passed the head of a narrow lane which turned off to the right. Beyond it a high wooden paling fronted the main road, broken in the centre by a couple of dilapidated iron gates, one of which was standing partly open. Farther back, behind a straggling shrubbery of laurels, the yellow gleam of a lighted window shone out into the garden.

"Someone's at home, evidently," muttered the Inspector. "Take us on as far as the end of the paling and pull up there. I'd like to know exactly how the land lies before we start work."

Contenting himself with a nod, Colin continued his way along the fence until he suddenly arrived at a closed gate leading into a ploughed field, from which an untrimmed hedge ran up at right angles, forming the boundary of the adjoining property. There was a piece of level grass at the side of the road, and, guiding the car on to this, he stopped his engine, and then, bending forward, switched off the headlights.

"You and Bates stay here for a moment," whispered Marsden. "Keep still and don't talk to each other. I'm just going along to have a squint through the hedge."

Getting out of the car, he climbed carefully over the gate, and moved up the field with the stealthiness of a poacher, until his burly figure was gradually lost to sight amid the shadows of the bushes.

He reappeared again after an absence of several minutes, and both Colin and Joe leaned eagerly forward from their seats as he clambered back and dropped lightly down beside them.

"Everything's in darkness this side of the house," he announced, "and, as far as I can see, there's no way of getting out of the garden. We'd better make tracks for the front gate and hear what Bentley's got to report."

Leaving the car as it was, the three of them stole silently back under the shelter of the fence, and came to a halt beneath the branches of a draggled-looking holly tree which overhung the drive.

After a brief wait they were joined by the sergeant, who emerged furtively from the side turning and advanced on tiptoe to where they were standing.

"I've found another entrance down the lane," he informed them. "It leads to a yard at the back, where there's a big shed that looks like a garage."

"A garage, eh?" rejoined Marsden. "Well, I guess somebody will have to keep an eye on that side of the house while the rest of us find some way

of getting in at the front." He paused for a moment, and then added quietly: "We'll take a look at the job first, and make up our minds exactly how we're going to tackle it. Unless we can drop in on 'em unexpectedly it's likely to be a pretty awkward business."

Followed by the others, he started cautiously forward up the drive, and, skirting the edge of the shrubbery, came out on to a neglected strip of grass, which at some remote period had evidently been a tennis lawn.

Facing them was the house, an old-fashioned two-story residence, with a tumble-down veranda half covered in ivy. From the french windows in the centre a broad patch of light streamed out hospitably through the drawn blinds.

Marsden's gaze travelled thoughtfully from one end of the building to the other.

"There's only way way to do it," he said, in a low voice. "We shall have to smash in the window and trust to luck." He turned to the sergeant. "We may nab the lot of them if we're quick enough, but we can't count on that, not when we've an old hand like Cooper to deal with. You'd better slip round to the yard again, Bentley, and keep a watch on the back door."

His assistant nodded. "Very good, sir. It won't take me more than a couple of minutes. I'll give you a whistle as soon as I'm ready."

He disappeared promptly and silently, and,

stepping back to where Colin and Joe were hiding in the shadow, the Inspector stooped down beside them.

"I think the simplest plan will be for one of us to tackle the window," he said. "I'll do that, and you two get ready to rush in the moment it's open."

"Supposing we can't force it?" whispered Colin. "Some of these windows have a bar across on the inside."

"In that case we must break the glass and get in as best we can. If Cooper looks like making trouble, keep out of the way and leave him to me."

He produced a heavy Service revolver, and, having clicked open the breech, proceeded to examine it with some care.

With his hands clenched and his heart beating fiercely, Colin stared out across the lawn, waiting for the signal. The feeling that ever since the morning Nancy had been a prisoner in one of those rooms, and at the mercy of such a scoundrel as Fenton, filled him with an apprehension that was almost unbearable. Even if they were in time to save her from the worst fate of all, heaven knew what hardships and misery she must have been through during the last eight hours. His nerves tingled with a savage longing to be face to face with the man who was responsible for her sufferings, and, crouching there in the darkness, he swore a bitter oath to himself that, whatever else happened, Fenton should not escape.

Suddenly, through the silence of the garden, a low

whistle sounded clearly from the back of the house. Colin was on his feet instantly, but before he could take a step forward both he and Joe were checked by a quick movement from their companion.

"I'll go first, doctor," whispered the Inspector. "You two keep close behind, and follow me in directly I smash the lock."

Stooping low, and holding the revolver in his left hand, he set off at a rapid pace across the lawn. It was only about twenty yards from the bushes to the house, and in less than half a dozen seconds all three of them were in front of the veranda.

Without pausing in his stride, Marsden made straight for the french window. It consisted of two fragile-looking doors, with a long pane of glass in each, and, using his shoulder as a battering ram, the detective hurled the full weight of his fourteen stone against the strip of woodwork in the centre.

The other two, who were immediately behind him, heard a splintering crash and a tinkle of broken glass. Then in the blaze of light that streamed out through the gap they saw Marsden stumble forward on to his hands and knees, and, like a scene on the stage, the whole interior of the room suddenly leaped into view.

No theatre, indeed, could have provided a more dramatic spectacle than the one which met Colin's eyes as he dashed for the opening. A couple of men, whom he recognised instantly as Cooper and Hudson, had sprung to their feet beside an over-

turned card-table, and were standing as though rooted to the spot with amazement and terror.

It was only for the fraction of a second, however, that the tableau remained unbroken. As Colin darted in past the Inspector, Cooper, who was the farther away of the two, seemed instinctively to recover his wits. With a movement as quick as a panther's he dived back behind his companion, and, taking a flying jump over the fallen table, raced headlong for the door.

His flight seemed to act on the deserted Hudson like the breaking of a spell. A foul oath burst from his lips, and, grabbing one of the overturned chairs by its nearest leg, he hurled it with all his force straight in the face of Colin.

The latter, who saw it coming, jerked up his arm just in time. It struck against his elbow and crashed down on to the floor, tripping up Joe as he attempted to dodge past in pursuit of the fugitive.

Staggered himself by the blow, Colin recovered almost instantly. One stride brought him within reach of his assailant, and, ducking under a clumsy swing, he smashed home a terrific right flush on the point of the jaw. It was a punch that would have floored ninety-nine men out of a hundred, and Mr. Jake Hudson was one of the unfortunate majority. He went down as though struck by a coal hammer, the back of his head landing with a loud thud against the edge of the table.

Brief though the delay had been, it had enabled

"Spike" Cooper to achieve his object. He was through the door and had slammed and locked it behind him before either the Inspector or Joe were able to regain their feet. It was Colin, indeed, who was the first to reach it, and he was already wrenching vainly at the handle when the two others rushed up to his assistance.

"Wait a minute," rasped the Inspector, who was evidently not in the best of tempers. "Let me blow in the lock, then we shall have a better chance."

Levelling his pistol, he emptied a couple of shots into the keyhole, the powerful bullets smashing and splintering the woodwork in every direction. As the second report died away they heard a scurry of footsteps outside, followed almost immediately by the unmistakable bang of another door.

Pocketing his pistol, the Inspector gripped hold of the knob with both hands, and as he jerked it violently towards him the shattered bolt snapped and yielded. One more pull, and they stumbled over the threshold into a dimly lighted hall, where, framed in a doorway opposite, stood, or rather swayed, the slender figure of a girl.

A low cry escaped from Colin's lips, and, breaking from his companions, he sprang forward and caught her in his arms.

"Nancy! Nancy darling! Thank God we've found you!"

As he uttered the words the sound of two pistol shots rang out from the back of the house, and with

a stifled oath the Inspector hurried towards them.

" Which is the way through into the yard ? " he demanded.

Nancy pointed across towards a door on the right.

" There ! " she gasped. " But it's locked. I heard them lock it and bolt it. You can only get round by the garden."

" Come with me, Bates," snapped the Inspector. " You stop here, doctor, and take care of the girl."

He ran towards the sitting-room, followed by Joe, while Nancy, who had momentarily straightened herself as she answered his question, sank weakly back again against Colin's shoulder.

Lifting her in his arms, he carried her to a small couch which was standing against the wall.

" Tell me, Nancy," he whispered, " tell me. Are you hurt ? "

With a gallant effort she smiled up reassuringly into his face.

" No," she said. " I am only tired out and a little faint. I—I've been through a good deal since this morning, Colin."

He sat down beside her, taking her hands in his.

" They brought you a forged letter from Penwarren, didn't they ? The girl who lives next door to you told us something about it."

She nodded. " I suppose it was foolish of me to be taken in, but it looked to me just like his handwriting. It said that he had suddenly discovered

the truth about my father and mother, and that he had come up to town especially to see me. I went off in the car almost without thinking."

"Where did they take you to?"

"Some house close to Kensington High Street. There was another man there besides Major Fenton —a horrible middle-aged, smiling man—and when they got me inside they held me down and drugged me with a hypodermic syringe. I think it must have been opium they gave me. Anyhow, the next thing I remember is waking up with a frightful headache, and finding myself locked up alone in that room."

With great difficulty Colin managed to steady his voice. "How long ago was that?" he asked.

"It seems ages, but I think it must have been about the middle of the day."

"And when did Fenton come back?"

"Just as it was growing dark. He had been down to the river to get the yacht ready, and had left one of the men here to look after me. He told me exactly what he meant to do—that he was going to take me away on the boat and keep me there until—until——" Her voice faltered.

"I know," said Colin quickly. "I've had the whole story from Medwin."

"The whole story! Oh, Colin, what does it mean? Why should he——"

"You shall hear everything in a minute," he

interrupted. "Just tell me first what happened when we broke into the house."

"It was all over so quickly," said Nancy. "He was in there talking to me and threatening me when we suddenly heard a tremendous crash, and one of the others—the man they call Spike—rushed into the room and shouted out something about the police. Before I could——" She stopped abruptly. "Listen!" she exclaimed. "They're coming back."

There was a sound of voices and steps on the veranda outside, and, letting go Nancy's hands, Colin jumped to his feet.

He walked across to the sitting-room door, where the sight which met his eyes caused him to hurry forward with a sudden exclamation of dismay. The Inspector and Joe were coming in through the window, carrying between them the limp, unconscious body of Sergeant Bentley.

Marsden glanced round, his usually stolid face flushed and contorted.

"They've shot him, doctor—shot him down like a dog and got away in the car. They must have had it standing ready in the garage."

As he spoke, he and Joe lowered their burden gently on to the thick rug which lay just across the window, and the next instant Colin had dropped on his knees, and was bending forward over the prostrate figure.

To an untrained eye the spectacle was a ghastly

one, for the man's face was covered with blood, which had trickled down from a broad gash in his forehead. His pulse was still beating, however, and after feeling it for a few moments, and then closely examining the injury, Colin looked up with a little gesture of relief.

"It's not as bad as it appears," he announced. "The bullet must have struck him sideways and glanced off the outside of his temple. He's only stunned."

"Only stunned!" repeated the Inspector. "Well, in that case he can stop here with Bates and Miss Seymour, while you and I go after the others. If they once get on board that boat we may have the devil's work in catching them."

Colin started up immediately, but before he could speak he was interrupted by Nancy, who had followed him into the room.

"I can tell you where the yacht's lying," she said. "I heard them talking about it. It's in some small creek just this side of Thames Haven."

The Inspector wheeled round sharply on Colin. "Do you know the way?" he demanded. "Do you think you can overtake them?"

"I expect I can," replied Colin, "unless Nancy would rather I stayed with her."

She shook her head decisively. "I shall be all right with Joe," she said. "I want to see those two men punished for trying to kill you."

"You'd want it still more if you knew what we do, miss," said the Inspector dryly.

He rummaged in the sergeant's pocket, and, pulling out a pair of light steel handcuffs, snapped them round the wrists of the still unconscious Hudson.

Colin turned to Nancy. "You might bathe this poor fellow's wound, and bandage him up with a clean handkerchief. If he comes round before we get back, make him lie perfectly still on the sofa."

She nodded quietly, and with an approving grunt the Inspector offered her his hand.

"Thank you, miss," he said. "You're a fine young lady, and I couldn't be more pleased to see you safe, not if you were my own daughter." Then, as if half embarrassed by this outburst, he added brusquely: "Come along, doctor! They've got a good start already, and we're only wasting time talking here."

He strode towards the window, and, just pausing to press a kiss on Nancy's fingers, Colin followed him out into the garden.

They made their way rapidly across the lawn and down to the front gate. The moon, which was almost at its full, had already risen, its silver beauty lighting up the roadway as plainly as though it were daytime.

The Inspector glanced up into the sky with some gratitude.

"We shall be able to see where we're going, at all

events," he observed. "How far do you think the river is from here?"

"It must be about ten miles to Thames Haven," was Colin's answer. "There's no other place they could have left the yacht—not this side of Canvey Island."

"Ten miles!" echoed the other. "Well, if Fenton knows anything about driving it's going to be a pretty close business."

Breaking into a run, they hurried along the road to where they had left the car, and with a sharp jerk of the handle Colin set the engine in motion. Followed by the Inspector, he scrambled into his seat, and a few seconds later he had backed hastily along the oak paling, and swung round into the side turning which ran southwards across the marshes.

It was not a route that anyone who was fond of his life would have selected deliberately for the purposes of fast driving. Narrow and winding, with a thick coating of mud plastered over its surface, it presented such obvious dangers that even the most foolhardy of motorists would have been forced to recognise the advisability of caution.

Caution, however, was the particular virtue which Colin felt least able to afford. Unless he could make up his lost ground on the more difficult stages of the journey he could certainly abandon all hope of success, for on an open and moonlit road Fenton's progress would probably be as fast as his own.

With a full appreciation of the chances that he

was taking he therefore let out the car to a pace which in any other circumstances he would never have attempted. Bumping over patches of loose stone, and splashing through pools of water, he held resolutely on, regardless of risk, while all the time immediately ahead of him two broad and recently imprinted tyre marks stretched away encouragingly through the mud.

Whatever the Inspector's private emotions may have been, it must be admitted that he faced the ordeal with masterly restraint. Once or twice, as they skidded violently round a blind corner, he caught hold of the side door with a spasmodic grip, but except for this instinctive movement he maintained an expressionless calm which certainly did credit to the self-discipline of the Yard.

For the first three miles Colin needed all his skill and luck to avoid disaster ; then, as they drew farther out into the lonely marshland which borders the north bank of the Thames, the conditions gradually improved. The east wind, which blows perpetually over the desolate region, had already begun to dry up the surface of the road, while with nothing but an occasional cowshed or a few leafless trees to obstruct the view, the chances of running headlong into some unforeseen death-trap were reduced to much more comforting proportions.

Suddenly, with an abrupt movement, the Inspector pointed ahead, to where a broad shaft of yellow light streamed out against the sky.

"What's that ?" he demanded, putting his lips close to Colin's ear.

"Mucking Lighthouse," was the answer. "There are some powder works away to the right, and the creek they're making for is just between the two."

At a furious pace the car leaped forward along the deserted road, the tell-tale track of the fugitives still standing out plainly in the glare of the head-lamps. Colin was much too occupied with the wheel to indulge in any further attempt at conversation, while sheltering his eyes from the wind with one hand, and grasping the back of the seat with the other, the Inspector stared out in front of him in grim silence.

Rounding a slight curve between two low banks, they emerged into a long stretch of almost perfectly straight roadway, and at the same moment a simultaneous shout burst from both their lips. There in the moonlight, not more than half a mile away, they could see the dark outline and gleaming tail-lamp of another car, travelling swiftly in the same direction as themselves.

"There they are !" roared the Inspector. "Keep her going, doctor ! Keep her going, and we've got 'em !"

With an inward prayer that his tyres would stand the strain, Colin drove down the accelerator to its extreme limit. The well-tuned engine responded to his call, and with the wind rushing in their faces, and the whole chassis quivering and rocking beneath

them, they surged on recklessly in pursuit of their escaping quarry.

Any doubt as to the respective pace of the two cars was settled in the next minute. Slowly but surely the distance between them lessened, until in the bright moonlight it was possible to make out the bare head and broad shoulders of "Spike" Cooper as he crouched in the seat alongside the driver, staring back over the swaying tonneau.

"Look out for that devil!" shouted the Inspector. "He'll start shooting directly we're close enough."

Clutching his own pistol in his hand, he leaned forward over the dashboard, his eyes glued on the motionless figure ahead.

Nearer and nearer they drew, the mud and gravel flying from beneath their wheels, the roar and throb of the engine seeming to beat time to the mad rhythm of the chase.

Suddenly, with a warning cry, Marsden raised his weapon. There was a simultaneous spurt of flame from both cars, and with a vicious thud something buried itself in the padded seat just beside Colin's shoulder.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

A second bullet ripped its way along the front mudguard, and then, with a kind of stupefying and unimaginable abruptness, the end came.

Colin was just conscious of a shower of sparks from beneath the steel-studded tyres as the

car in front of him swerved violently across the road.

By some instinctive movement his hand shot out towards the brake lever, and almost at the same second came a deafening and appalling crash, that seemed to strike him in the face like a blow from a fist.

## CHAPTER XII

"THAT's done it," remarked the Inspector bitterly.

He was standing in the car which Colin had just pulled up, staring down over a heap of stones at the black mass of broken wreckage which reared itself fantastically amongst the grass.

"I should think it was about the finish," said Colin quietly. "What on earth made them skid in that extraordinary way?"

"I suppose I hit Fenton by mistake," said the Inspector. "Just like my cursed luck. He must have driven straight into it and gone clean over the top. It's a hundred to one they're both dead."

"We'll soon find out, anyhow," was Colin's answer, and, opening the door as he spoke, he jumped down into the roadway.

A few strides brought him alongside the fallen car, where, in the pitiless moonlight, every detail of the tragedy stood out with horrible distinctness. Almost the first sight that met his eyes were the bodies of Fenton and Cooper, the former pinned down under the debris amid a cloud of escaping steam, and the other sprawled full length on the bare ground.

It was very obvious that nothing could be done for Fenton. The top of his skull had been smashed

in like an egg-shell, and, after just pausing to glance at the injury, Colin hurried over towards the prostrate figure of his companion.

The Canadian was lying on his face, his arms and legs flung out at a grotesque angle. To anyone with medical knowledge there was something fatally suggestive about the mere attitude of the limbs, and it was no little surprise to Colin that, as he stooped down to make a closer examination, a low groan reached his ears.

With great care he turned over the helpless man and raised him in his arms.

"Well, we've got one of 'em alive, anyhow," observed the Inspector, who had followed him across the grass.

As though conscious of the remark, Cooper opened his eyes, and for a moment lay there with his head on Colin's shoulder, gazing up vaguely into the two faces above him. Then something that was almost a grin flickered across his face.

"I guess we've met before, mister," he jerked out faintly. "Say, how did your friends get you out of that cellar?"

"Never mind now," interrupted the detective curtly. "You've got something else to think about at present. I am Inspector Marsden of Scotland Yard, and I arrest you for the murder of Professor Carter."

There was a glint of mockery in Cooper's face as his eyes travelled slowly in the direction of the speaker.

"Good for you, Sherlock Holmes," he gasped. "I reckon the British police ain't quite such duds after all." He paused, as though the effort of speaking had been almost too much for him. "It's tough luck you won't get the credit of hanging me," he added, in an even feebler voice. "Still, if you will be so damn careless with that gun o' yours——" He stopped, and with a little choking cough spat out a mouthful of blood.

The Inspector turned anxiously to Colin.

"What's the matter with him?" he demanded.

"His spine's practically broken," said Colin. "He can't live more than a few minutes."

Marsden bent over the dying man, on whose white face the moonlight streamed down with a peculiarly ghastly effect.

"Listen to me, Cooper," he said. "We know all about you. We've got your record from Montreal. Fenton's dead, and I don't imagine that our friend Medwin is a particular pal of yours. Come, man, you may as well tell us the truth."

Cooper, who seemed to be breathing with extreme difficulty, moistened his lips.

"It's no good, mister," he faltered. "You can't put a rope round Medwin's neck—not this journey. He hadn't no more to do with croaking the old guy than you or the doctor."

Marsden nodded. "I know that," he said. "You broke into the house the second time by yourself in order to try and rob the safe. Neither

Fenton nor Medwin knew anything about it—until afterwards."

Cooper looked up at him again, the same half-jeering smile on his drawn face.

"You ought to be with Pinkerton," he gasped. "You're just wasted here."

As he dragged out the last word another paroxysm of coughing overtook him. It lasted for several seconds, and then, with a queer, fluttering movement of the eyelids, his head suddenly lolled over sideways on to his shoulder, the under jaw dropping open at the same time.

Colin lowered his burden to the ground, and, after wiping his hands on the grass, rose to his feet.

For a moment the Inspector stood still, gazing down at the body.

"Well, that's done the hangman out of a job," he observed regretfully. "What's more, I believe the devil was right. We shall only be able to charge Medwin with conspiracy, though if any man ever deserved—— Hallo! here's somebody coming!"

He broke off abruptly at the sight of a dark figure, which was approaching along the roadway from the direction in which they had been travelling.

"One of the men from the powder works, I expect," said Colin. "We're quite close by, and they probably heard the smash."

Marsden stepped forward to meet the new arrival, who had turned on to the grass and was hurrying rapidly towards them. As he drew

nearer they saw that he was a respectable-looking middle-aged man, dressed in a rough suit of tweeds.

He came on at a kind of stumbling run, and pulled up with an exclamation of horror as the full extent of the disaster suddenly met his eyes.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "I was afraid there had been a bad accident. Is anybody killed?"

"Yes," said Marsden bluntly. "Both these men are dead." He paused. "Who are you, sir, and where do you come from?" he asked.

"My name's Trevor. I'm the head electrician at the powder mills just down the road."

"Well, I'm a police officer," said Marsden, "and this gentleman is Dr. Gray."

"A police officer?" repeated the other. "Is there anything——"

"One of our friends here," continued Marsden, jerking his head in the direction of Cooper's body, "is the murderer of Professor Carter. I have no doubt you read about the case in the papers. The other was wanted on an almost equally serious charge."

Their new acquaintance stood staring at them in open-mouthed amazement.

"But—but what on earth were they doing down here?" he stammered.

"They were trying to reach Thames Haven, where they hoped to get on board a boat. We were following them in another car, and just as they got

to this point they swerved right across the road into that heap of stones. You can see the result for yourself."

The electrician nodded his head. "Yes," he replied, "I can. You must excuse my being a bit flabbergasted, but it's pretty quiet round about here as a rule, and this kind of thing's a trifle out of my line." He removed the soft hat that he was wearing and wiped his forehead with his coat-sleeve. "What do you propose to do?" he asked. "We've a telephone at the works if you'd like me to get into communication with anyone."

Marsden pulled out his pocket-book and extracted a card.

"This is my name," he said. "Do you mind going straight back and ringing up the Southend Police Station? Say that you're speaking for me, and ask them to send out a motor ambulance and a car as soon as possible. They'll know the powder works, and when they arrive perhaps you'll be good enough to bring them on here."

"Why, certainly," was the answer. "In the meanwhile, if there's anything you want that I can let you have——"

"Well, I don't know if you could run to a whisky and soda," suggested Marsden hopefully. "I could do with a drink after what we've been through the last quarter of an hour."

"I'll send one of the men along with it," responded the other, and without waiting to be

thanked he nodded a hasty farewell, and set off at once in the direction of the roadway.

Marsden turned to Colin. " You can get back to 'The Firs' and pick up Miss Seymour, if you like. There's no point in your remaining here, unless you want to stop until the whisky comes."

" Oh, hang the whisky ! " said Colin. " It's you I'm thinking of. I can't leave you stranded in a ditch with a couple of corpses."

" You needn't worry about that," returned Marsden cheerfully. " I've been in worse company, and, in any case, the Southend police will be turning up in round about half an hour. No, you go along, doctor, and take Miss Seymour home in the car."

" What about the sergeant and Joe ? " inquired Colin.

" They can wait for us. We shall be passing the house on our way back, and if Bentley's still unconscious there'll be room for him in the ambulance."

" Well, it seems rather a shame to desert you," said Colin. " All the same, if you really don't mind I think I *will* push off. Nancy must be pretty well tired out, and the sooner I can get her back to Shadwell the better."

" She'll be all right," said Marsden encouragingly. " If you think she needs a little tonic give her my congratulations and tell her that she's worth a couple of hundred thousand pounds." He held out his hand. " You shall hear from me later in

the evening. I'll either phone you up or come down to Shadwell myself."

"Come if you possibly can," said Colin. "Nancy will be longing to thank you for everything you've done, and if you want any further inducement Mark's got some topping good champagne."

* * * * *

The light was still streaming out through the shattered window as, leaving his car at the gate of "The Firs," Colin once more made his way up the drive and strode eagerly across the lawn.

On reaching the veranda he found that the broken hasp had been fastened roughly together inside by a piece of wire, and while he was endeavouring to disentangle the latter the figure of Joe appeared suddenly in the doorway.

At the sight of Colin he hastened forward with a shout of welcome.

"'Alf a moment, guv'nor. 'Ere, let me get at it. You'll cut your 'and on that glass if you ain't careful."

With a quick turn of his fingers he wrenched off the wire and flung open the window, and at the same moment Nancy herself came hurrying into the room.

"Oh, Colin, at last!" she cried. "I was so afraid that something had happened to you."

Regardless of Joe, Colin took her into his arms and kissed her two or three times with reassuring fervour.

"Nothing has happened to me, Nancy," he said.

"I'm afraid I can't say the same with regard to Fenton and Cooper."

She looked up at him with a startled expression in her eyes.

"Colin!" she exclaimed. "You don't mean——"

His arms tightened round her. "I had to let you know," he said gently, "though I hate to spring any more horrors on you. I'm not sure it isn't all for the best. Cooper would certainly have been hanged, and as for Fenton——"

"Wot's 'appened, guv'nor?" broke in Joe anxiously. "You ain't goin' to tell me they're both dead?"

"They were when I left them," said Colin. "As dead as anyone I've ever seen in my life. They ran into a heap of loose stones just this side of Thames Haven and smashed themselves to pieces."

"Well, if that ain't the limit!" observed Joe disgustedly. "'Ere 'ave I bin waitin' to bash 'ell outer that bloke Cooper——"

"Stop, Joe!" commanded Nancy almost angrily. "I won't have you talking like that. It's wicked."

The abashed boxer fell back, and with a quick breath she turned again to Colin.

"Where's the Inspector?" she asked. "Why hasn't he come with you?"

"He's all right," said Colin. "We got someone to send a message through to the Southend police, and he's waiting for them to turn up with a

motor ambulance. He suggested that in the meanwhile I should come on here and take you home in the car. He's going to call for Joe and the sergeant on his way back." He paused and glanced inquiringly round the room. "By the way," he added, "where is the sergeant, and what's happened to my pal Jake Hudson ?"

"Hudson's locked up in the cellar," replied Nancy. "We carried the other poor man into the hall and put him on the sofa. I bandaged up his head as well as I could, but he's still unconscious."

"I'll go in and have a look at him," said Colin. "Then I should think we might as well push off. I've all sorts of exciting news for you, Nancy."

"If you mean about Mr. Carter being my grandfather," she interrupted calmly, "I know that already."

Colin stared at her in amazement. "You know it already ?" he repeated.

She nodded her head. "Yes," she said, "Joe told me. Of course, there's a lot I don't understand yet, but——"

"I didn't mean to do it, guv'nor," protested Joe ; "strike me dead if I did. She jest started askin' questions, and afore I knew wot 'ad 'appened, damn me if I 'adn't given away the 'ole show."

Colin looked from one to the other of them, and then began to laugh.

"I thought I could depend on you, Joe," he said reproachfully.

The boxer glanced at Nancy with a kind of admiring resentment. " I always reckoned I could keep my mouth shut," he muttered, " but she's one o' them young ladies a bloke ain't got no chance with."

" I don't know if that's a compliment or not," said Nancy. " Anyhow, Colin, do come along and see what you think of my patient. We shall have plenty of time to talk about me when we're going home in the car."

She led the way out into the hall, and, crossing to where the unconscious and heavily breathing Bentley lay propped up on the sofa amongst a pile of cushions, Colin bent down to inspect the bandages which encircled his head.

" Nothing the matter with this," he said approvingly. " You must have been having lessons from Mark in your spare time." He made a brief examination of the man's pulse and general condition, while the others stood by watching him in silence. " I don't think there'll be much to worry about when he comes round," he added, " but of course he'll have to keep to his bed for a day or two." He turned to Joe. " Put some of those cushions round him so that he isn't shaken about in the ambulance, and tell Marsden to take him to the hospital directly you reach London."

" I believe there must be some kind of curse on me," said Nancy rather ruefully. " I seem to bring trouble on everyone I have anything to do with."

" You ain't no call to feel like that, miss," objected Joe. " A cracked 'ead ain't much in the way of trouble—not for a policeman, any'ow."

" You can be pretty sure that that's the way in which Bentley will look at it," said Colin. " As for the Inspector "—his grey eyes lit up with a boyish twinkle—" well, if he hadn't told me that he was a married man with three children I should have been jolly careful not to ask him round to Shadwell this evening."

With a little laugh Nancy held out her hands towards him.

" Take me home, Colin," she said. " I feel like Charles Lamb when they gave him a pension. I want to go home for ever."

* * * * *

Mark filled up his empty glass, and, settling himself in his arm-chair, beamed paternally at Colin and Nancy, who were sitting opposite to him on the sofa.

" It only shows how careful one ought to be," he said. " Just think of the chance I missed when I took Nancy on as a secretary ! If I'd had any idea that she was going to blossom out suddenly as a sort of female Rothschild I should have immediately adopted her as my daughter."

" Perhaps it's as well you didn't," said Colin, laughing. " She'd have found it a bit of a strain to carry out the fifth commandment."

Nancy, who was looking distractingly pretty as she lay back against the cushions, smiled contentedly at them both.

" I think it's much better as it is," she said. " If I hadn't known what it felt like to be bullied and ordered about I shouldn't be half so happy when I'm married to Colin."

Mark set down his glass with an air of pretended dismay.

" But, my dear child," he exclaimed, " you can't possibly marry Colin now. You must put that idea right out of your head. Why, with your looks and two hundred thousand pounds you might make an alliance with a duke."

There was a moment's pause.

" By Jove, yes ! " observed Colin blankly. " I never thought of that."

He turned to Nancy, but before he could add anything further she raised her finger in a peremptory warning.

" It's no use, Colin dear," she said. " Joe saw you hugging and kissing me at 'The Firs,' and I'm not the sort of girl to allow my young affections to be trifled with. If you attempt to back out of it now I shall sue you for breach of promise."

The distant tinkle of a bell sounded through the house, and, raising himself in his chair, Mark glanced indignantly at the clock.

" Oh, hang it all ! " he exclaimed. " I'm not going to see any more patients to-night. It's

nearly ten, and, besides that, I'm beautifully and comfortably intoxicated."

"It may be Marsden," suggested Colin. "He promised to come down if he could manage to spare the time."

They heard the front door open and close, and after a brief interval the somewhat breathless figure of Martha Jane burst unceremoniously into the room.

"There's a police inspector downstairs," she announced. "'E says 'e's come to see Dr. Gray."

Mark hoisted himself to his feet. "Show him up," he said hospitably, "and then fetch along another glass. If anyone else calls, tell them that I've been sent for to Buckingham Palace to operate on the King."

Leaving the door open behind her, Martha Jane vanished down the staircase. There was a murmur of voices, followed by a creak of footsteps, and a moment later she reappeared, with the bullet head and broad shoulders of the detective mounting in her wake.

Jumping up from the sofa, Colin met him as he entered the room.

"So glad you've been able to come, Marsden," he exclaimed. "We only wanted you to complete the party." He waved an introductory hand in the direction of Mark. "This is my friend, Dr. Ashton. I don't think there's any need to introduce you to Miss Seymour!"

Marsden smiled, and, stepping forward, shook hands with his host.

"Pleased to meet you, doctor," he said. "I'm sorry to disturb you at this hour, but, as you've probably heard, we've been having rather a busy and exciting afternoon." He turned to Nancy. "I hope you're not feeling much the worse for it, miss?"

"Not a bit," said Nancy, "thanks to you and Colin. I only wish I could tell you how grateful I am for all you've done for me."

Marsden shook his head. "It's very good of you to say so, miss, but I'm not throwing any bouquets at myself this journey. On the contrary, I don't think I've ever made so many blunders in a case in the whole of my professional career."

"Why, what are you worrying about?" demanded Colin. "Except for the regrettable fact that we can't hang Cooper——"

"You haven't heard my news yet," interrupted Marsden. "I'm almost ashamed to confess it, but the fact remains that we've allowed Medwin to slip through our fingers."

Colin stared at him incredulously. "Medwin escaped!" he exclaimed.

"If you like to put it that way. He has escaped being sent for trial, anyhow. At the present moment he's lying in the mortuary at the Kensington Police Station."

With a faint cry of horror Nancy caught hold of Colin's hand.

"It was all my fault," continued Marsden. "I ought to have made certain of him before we left London. It never occurred to me he'd play us a dirty trick like this."

"What do you mean?" broke in Colin. "When I left him he was tied up on the sofa. How on earth——"

"Well, the servants came back and untied him," said Marsden curtly. "He invented some cock-and-bull story about having been attacked by a couple of burglars, and then sent them down to the kitchen and locked himself in his study. As soon as I got back to London I telephoned through to Kensington and gave instructions for his arrest, but by that time it was too late. They found him sitting dead in his chair, with a letter which he had just written lying on the table beside him. He had swallowed enough poison to kill half a dozen people."

There was a brief silence.

"I see now," said Colin slowly. "He told me he knew when he was beaten, and that's evidently what he meant." He paused. "And the letter?" he asked.

Marsden put his hand in his pocket and produced a large square envelope.

"The letter was my chief reason for coming down here. As a matter of fact, it was addressed to

you, but under the circumstances I've taken the liberty of opening it."

He presented the envelope to Colin, who, after glancing unbelievingly at his own name, pulled out and unfolded its contents.

*3, Albert Terrace,*
*Kensington.*

*My dear Gray,—You will probably be surprised at receiving a letter from me, but you must put it down to the whim of a dying man.*

*The truth is, I feel that I owe an apology both to you and to Miss Seymour.*

*I will make no attempt to defend my conduct. I frankly admit that it justifies practically every one of the uncomplimentary epithets which you hurled at me in the course of your dramatic visit.*

*The only accusation against which I must enter a protest is that neither Fenton nor I were in any way concerned with the murder of my old friend and client, the late Professor Carter. On this point you are entirely mistaken. It was the work of that senseless ruffian Cooper, whom we had employed to assist us in breaking into the Red Lodge when we found it necessary to examine the Professor's papers. I sincerely hope that this information will be of some assistance in bringing him to the gallows.*

*On the charges of embezzlement and conspiracy, however, the fact remains that I have rendered*

*myself liable to a considerable term of penal servitude. It is an unpleasant position, but one which I am perfectly prepared to face. Playing for high stakes has always had a peculiar attraction for me, and in the event of failure I have never been one of those poor-spirited sportsmen who object to settling their accounts.*

*I doubt if you will believe me, but I should like to say in conclusion that as far as you are concerned I have no feeling of resentment. On the contrary, if you had not been so infernally in my way it would have been a distinct pleasure to me to cultivate your society. Being of a somewhat complex temperament, I derive considerable enjoyment from the companionship of a crude and vigorous young savage like yourself.*

*I do not know whether you arrived in time to rescue Miss Seymour from the embraces of our mutual friend, but I have no doubt that you will succeed in consoling her from any unpleasant experiences to which she may have been subjected. From the little I saw of her she struck me as being a singularly attractive and high-spirited young lady.*

*Please convey to her my apologies for the unchivalrous treatment she has received, and also express my regret that there should be a shortage of some twenty thousand pounds in the money to which she is entitled. As the sum which still remains, however, amounts to about a hundred and seventy*

*thousand pounds, it will be amply sufficient to provide you both with those minor comforts and luxuries which form such an agreeable addition even to the happiest of married lives.*

*Believe me, my dear Gray,*
*Your sincere admirer,*
*James Stanhope Medwin.*

Colin read through this remarkable communication in silence, and, having come to the end, handed it to Nancy.

"It's just the sort of letter I should have expected him to write," he observed. "The only thing I'm surprised at is that he didn't send us a wedding present."

"Well, it's queer your putting it like that," replied the detective. "As a matter of fact, it's the very same remark which I made to the Commissioner. There's a certain type of criminal who doesn't care what happens to him as long as he can die showing off and codding himself that he's a sportsman and a gentleman."

"I suppose that's true," said Nancy, looking up from the letter. "I do wish he hadn't killed himself, though. I hate to feel that three people have lost their lives, and all on account of——"

"It's only because you're not accustomed to it," interrupted Mark comfortingly. "When one's been a doctor for twenty years a trifling massacre like this leaves one quite unperturbed."

As he spoke Martha Jane appeared with the clean glass, and, taking it off the tray, he turned to Marsden.

"How about a drop of champagne, Inspector?" he suggested. "There's nothing like it after a busy day, and, besides, you've got to drink the health of the happy pair."

"I won't say no to a good offer like that," returned the detective.

He accepted the beaker which Mark held out to him, and, raising it in his hand, nodded first to Nancy and then to Colin.

"I've already congratulated the doctor," he said. "As for you, miss, if you'll excuse my saying so, I think you've made as big a success in choosing a husband as you did in choosing a grandfather."

He drained his glass to the dregs, and set it down on the table with an appreciative smack.

"I'm sorry to tear myself away from such a pleasant party," he added, "but I've got to get back to the Yard and complete my report of the case. We're fixing the inquest for the day after to-morrow."

"Shall I have to give evidence?" inquired Nancy in some dismay.

"I'm afraid there's no getting out of that, miss. You and Dr. Gray will be the two principal witnesses, but I shall be seeing the Coroner first, and you can take it from me that you won't be asked more questions than are absolutely necessary." He

turned to Colin. "I should like to see you the first thing in the morning, doctor. This case is bound to attract a good deal of attention, and there are one or two points in connection with it which it will be better if we keep to ourselves."

"That's all right," said Colin calmly. "You tell me what you want us to say, and Nancy and I will stick to it like Britons."

Marsden laughed, and, picking up his cap from the table, shook hands all round.

"Let me see you as far as the door, Inspector," suggested Mark. "I think I'm just sober enough to be able to manage the staircase."

He led the way out on the landing, followed by the detective, and for the first time since their return to the house Colin and Nancy found themselves alone.

He put his arm round her, and, bending down, kissed her hair.

"You mustn't let all this distress you too much, darling," he said gently. "It's been a horrible and ghastly business, but I do believe it's ended in the best way possible. If these men hadn't been killed——"

"I know, Colin," she said. "I think it's only a sort of selfish feeling I've got. I am so happy myself I want everyone else to be happy too."

"So they are!" declared Colin. "At least, everyone who matters. There's you and I and Mark and Mary and Joe——" He paused. "By the way, I wonder what's happened to Joe."

"I know what's going to happen to him," said Nancy. "Directly I get my money I'm going to buy him the biggest and most beautiful public house in Shadwell. If it wasn't for Joe——" Her voice faltered, and with a sudden impulsive movement she caught hold of Colin's hand and pressed it to her cheek.

For a moment he stood looking down at her, his grey eyes alight with love and tenderness.

"There's only one thing that isn't quite perfect," he said slowly. "I'm afraid that, whatever success I meet with in my research work, I'm bound to be more or less disappointed."

"Oh, Colin, what do you mean?"

"Why," he whispered softly, "I've already made the greatest discovery in the world. *I've found you.*"

THE END